Short Cosmic Stories
a cosmos original 2022
John A.Walker
www.cosmos-original-productions.co.uk

Copyright © John A.Walker
2022 Copyright © John A.Walker.
The right of John A.Walker to be identified as author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1998.
Conditions of Sale:
1. This book is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out or otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, transmitted or stored in a retrieval system, in any form or by any means, without permission in writing from Cosmos Original Productions.
published by Cosmos Original Productions, Glasgow.

Psalm 24:1 *The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein*.

SHORT COSMIC STORIES
JOHN ARMSTRONG WALKER

The Reluctant Seer

On the doorstep to the country, on the south side of Glasgow, in a place known as Greenside, there lived an unusual man. He may have been old, but he was like a young boy the way he spoke to the villagers. The people called him the Reluctant Seer. They could see that he was a prophet.

Every day this man went around spreading the good news about the Saviour. He knew the traditions had been good in this area, but a new generation had come along and thought all things old should be thrown out - just like old fashioned clothes in a wardrobe. They made it known they would replace old with new wherever they went.

They Reluctant Seer tried to warn the villagers by making it known there is nothing new under the sun. But the people did not listen to him. He could see they were isolated in their fast cars and double glazed homes.

Like many others in the country, the Reluctant Seer could see the villagers had been brainwashed by secular leaders, and now they were lost in a world where the only thing that seemed to matter was what was said in the media.

Most of them had not only fallen into the hands of secular teachers, but were advocating now what they said. Media instructors were active in all areas of society - even the church.

Once again on the Sabbath day, the Reluctant Seer went and stood outside his local church. There he addressed the people going by on the street, and going inside the old building:

“My friends do not be afraid of those who want to end the traditions of this land. Or those who stay silent when they hear false religion being preached. Do not be afraid, brothers and sisters, when you see others being discriminated upon. We have now entered into a period of discord. You cannot be saved from those dark forces around you unless you go towards the Light.”

The Reluctant Seer knew that he had to go onto the street and tell the people this and explain to them what had happened to the place where they lived.

“Why have you fallen away from the traditions of your fathers?” he asked them.

So undercover of the night, once again the Reluctant Seer left his house and posted his thoughts near to the temple door:

“You have been given the truth,” then he went home and slept a beautiful sleep.

The following week, the Reluctant Seer went back to the temple and as the bells rang out, once again he spoke to the people about freedom and democracy:

“When the state does not understand the people, and the people have become isolated from their natural state, a conflict will ensue under the banner of freedom and democracy. The fuel for violence is misunderstanding joy. Those who cannot partake in ecstasy become angry and annoyed. When this happens, the people of the Light must come forward and lead the way. There is only one Man who can bring the past back into the present for you.”

The Reluctant Seer as he stood outside the temple warned the people there about those following New Age religion.

“Everything you do shows the meaning of your maker. You are grounded in transparency. The building here behind me is about to be gutted. Thereafter, free thinking people will enter it. They have been active here in this area for some time now,

colouring the minds of the unbelievers, getting them to praise the earth, and the people in it. Believers have been diverted from the true path. New Age people have taken advantage of those who have become weak. To get out of this predicament, men have become Nights of Faith, letting everyone see that they are protecting a feminine religion. Meanwhile, the female eunuch teaches them here in this temple all the things you see and hear in the world. Men, young and old, are now like in olden times, defending a New Age religion against society, and their leader the White Witch from all those who challenge her. The White Witch has a file on everyone in the area. Every day she goes out from her house to lead people towards the ways of the world. She takes them into the wilderness where the winner never wins. She has weakened them by making them into nice people. They no longer go direct to God, but hang on to her every word. The White Witch to take away their strength has trained them to be mannerly, but she despises them and mocks them every time she sees them in the temple, or on the street. With honeyed words she tells them how to be nice again. To survive in this world they

think they must drink the bitter wine she offers them from her withered hands.”

The Reluctant Seer then just before midday spoke to the people about the law, and how a court must try a man in person, not from a far away place.

“Only in the living space that exists between citizens can you try a man for an alleged crime. He is innocent within that space, and within that time, and nothing should change that: not wars, rumours of wars, or plagues.”

Just before the light drifted into the darkness, the Reluctant Seer went again and stood outside the temple, and told the people the news they had been waiting to hear.

“The state we are living in has become lost within itself. They now promote things that went on before the Light came into the world. You must now protect yourself against the state, as you live within it.”

Just then, a young man heading home shouted up to the Reluctant Seer: “Old man will the church not protect us?”

“No, not if it is controlled by the state, my young friend.”

After witnessing the summer solstice, the next day the Reluctant Seer then headed back to the temple, and there outside the old church he addressed the people once again:

“You must learn from the past. The Jesuits hated Pascal: for they wanted to usher in all sorts of new doctrines to grow their numbers. They even likened him to the Protestants. This is the same as the New Age people are doing today. They want to mirror what is going on in society. When you confront them, and what they are doing, they shutdown free speech, ban people they do not like, and orchestrate a hate campaign against them. They have friends in the police, the judiciary, and in the government. New Age people control them with fear of the unknown, then flatter them about the work they are doing.

Nothing has changed, my friends, only their names have."

Seeing the old man standing outside the church again, the same young man as before shouted up at him: "Reluctant Seer, what happens when the state becomes authoritarian?"

"When that happens, my young friend, some live in fear, some live in ignorance, and some stay and fight for freedom?"

"What is freedom, old man?"

"Freedom is love, and love is being free."

"And what does that mean?"

“It means that a word that wants to stop you being free does not affect you; for people who live in the Light know that they have been born again and are free, and they will die free.”

The Reluctant Seer then gazed around him at the country village. He could see people were isolated in their cars and homes. Like many other places around the world, his local village had been destroyed by seductive forces: greed and vanity.

The bemused young man looked happy enough at what he had heard, and after he moved away a young woman crossed the road to see what was going on outside the church. She too stopped and listened to the old man who was standing in front of the temple.

To her the Reluctant Seer looked passive, so she was surprised when she heard the old man’s voice say:

“The people here for a long time now have been dominated by speculators and materialists. They have come into your area and have befriended you. Men and women hungry for status and luxury have made their way into your homes, councils and churches. Now that they have reached positions of power, they think they can control you.”

For a time the young woman listened to the Reluctant Seer. Like others in the area, she had seen him many times before, though she had never heard him speak. As he looked at her she heard him say:

“Do not follow the ways of the world, my dear,” but she was not sure what he meant by this.

Once again undercover of the night, the old man left his house and posted his thoughts onto the temple door:

“You have what you need.”

The Reluctant Seer could see that the people were afraid. Many people had been brainwashed by

secular leaders. That morning the Reluctant Seer again warned the people about the White Witch. He knew she was the priestess in his local area, and many people were following her. The Reluctant Seer had a strong voice; it could be heard across the road where people were visiting the shops. Some people paused before going in to buy their morning goods to listen to him, others hurried on by.

However, the White Witch did not come out to hear him. She hid behind the window in her house after she had opened it.

The Reluctant Seer for many years now had lived in a hut by the River Cart. He was happy there. The people kept an eye out for him; for they knew he lived alone. As is the way of life, some villagers did not like him and were always passing on stories about him especially to the authorities.

Early the next morning, the Reluctant Seer walked again to his local church, and once there he stood quite still looking up at the bell tower. One or

two cars passed by, but apart from that the streets around him were quiet.

That morning he prayed with his eyes closed and his hands opened wide.

“Dear God, save us from what is to come. The good people who are standing for your Word are being persecuted. Save us from the apostates and from those who are masquerading as believers, hidden in the church, and those in society who are undermining it. The young must learn how the people came here, by Grace, offering your Word. They were faithful and passed it on. Bring back the traditions to this land. Save us from the New Age people who want to end your teachings.”

Just then a lad stopped; he was the local paper boy. And as he got off his bike he listened to the old man. When he had finished praying the Reluctant Seer saw him standing there. He asked the lad:

“My young friend, have you been given the right to speak?”

“Yes, sir. I always say what I think”

“Good for you. However, unlike you there are some people in this village that do not understand that citizens have the freedom to speak, let alone think. What you are being told now is that freedom of speech is limited - sometimes not welcomed anymore. I say to you beware of those who limit your ability to express yourself. They even attach themselves to religious buildings. You will see them from time to time. Remember, my young friend, what is written:”

Math 5 16 *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*.

“That is the only way to understand those who follow the Light. Here in this area where you live, people have become lost inside a material world. Their cars and their phones are more important to them than their family, friends and neighbours. They look out at others now from behind glass, as if it is

their pleasure to do so. They only know others in the passing now."

The young lad thought about what he had heard, and after a moment or two asked the old man:

"What will happen to them?"

"The end of the artificial world is coming. We will go back to nature. We will learn again how to live. The Light comes from those who have been given it will never be put out. It is there for all to see, but those who look to the world, they will not find it there. They will be lost without their symbols and images. In confusion, they will worship each other until they destroy one another."

That day the Reluctant Seer spoke at great lengths to the people who lived in what they called, 'the good area'.

"You cannot have a democracy without freedom of speech. The world is evil and people must be able to call out and protest against what is happening to

them. The alternative is grave indeed. If freedom is taken away, you will find yourself inside an autocracy. There are many people, young and old male and female, that will fill that role. Civil servants act when they are told to do so, as are judges and the courts. This is where we are heading unless you stand firm and speak out against those who are trying to shutdown free speech. The freedom of expression has been paid for by the blood of the Saviour. Men and women have died for the right for you to be heard. The politicians, as others do, now operate from laptops and Internet sites. Those who have been harangued by the new anti freedom laws know that the laws have been posted too high for them to read. The police are none the wiser than they were before the Internet age. The Internet has given the state the opportunity to monitor its subjects, and they are only too pleased to do that. They employ all sorts of rouges to collect data on the citizen. You must escape from the control of the Internet."

The young lad was holding onto his bike now as if someone was about to steal it. However, he did not move.

“How can we escape the control of others?” he asked the old man.

“I will tell you how to do that. When they ask your name do not give it unless they give you a valid reason for asking for it. Put your hands out and together, and wait for them to be handcuffed. And when you are at the police station tell the desk clerk that you will speak to the judge in the morning. Tell the judge your story saying: ‘I am a law abiding citizen and I am not involved with anything that is against the state.’ Then ask the judge to dismiss you. Ask for the light from God to come through his Son. And if you are in court tell your story; for the air is free that you breathe. You will notice that those advocates who wish to take away the power of speech will look away from you as you speak. You will see contempt in their faces. You will see vanity in their relationships with others. You will see

hypocrisy in their deeds. You will see a strange thing: hatred of one another."

"Surely there must be some good people who work in the courts?" asked the young lad sighing as if he wanted to run away.

"Yes, there are but in an autocratic state they too can be overpowered. The power of deception is always hidden from view, my friend. What is hidden you must bring to the Light. Even then they will try and use your words against you to stop you doing this."

"If I get into trouble, or someone makes a claim against me?" asked the young lad, "What can I do?

"Do not be afraid my young friend. Stand firm, state your case, answer their questions with direct firmness. Remember injustice is always around you. It is always active, but be not afraid."

“Reluctant Seer what will happen to us here in this area?”

“Listen to my voice, I will tell you what is to come. There will be wars and rumours of wars. There will be suffering. There will be men and women, who once lived moral lives, will turn against their friends for the sake of money. The wind that blows from here to wherever is as mysterious as the changes that will come upon our lives. It is true what they say: an ill will and good fortune are always together. One is sought after and the other ignored. Neighbours will no longer respect neighbours; they will enter their homes. Communities will be devastated. Only the peacemakers will be heard. They will cry on the street. All others will be at each other’s throats. Your cars will sit where you left them. No longer will people move around the city, to the coast, or to the country. Transport will be irregular. Carefree days when money was plentiful will be no more. Work will only go on for the sake of the state to survive. The appetites of men will be revealed by the way

they act with each other. Until the evil is exhausted this will continue. Then will come the change."

"I will need to tell my friends what you say, old man?"

As the lad hurried away, the Reluctant Seer looked to the sky and prophesied to the few that had gathered outside the church.

"In this time when no one knows what is true, the great machines of commerce and industry will slow down. You will be part of a time again when what is made will be seen as something important. It will be made to last. The throw away world you have known will come to an end. The craving for what is new will become outdated. Your connection with other places will be different. What you have will be treasured. Foreign people will only appear when the days are long again. Work with be local and what is made will be sought after. The car will be no more."

One fellow in the small crowd worked in the motor industry, and he was disgusted by what he had just heard. He got quite annoyed:

“People worship their cars old man they will never let them go.”

“In a world where the world is praised there is no way for your children to learn. Schools will no longer be active. You must seek out those who proclaim God and they will teach you. They are no longer part of the official community. You will find them on the street. They are there preaching the Word of God. You will find them in friends and at the workplace. You will find them in shops and in bars and restaurants. The word created by God is moving in new mysterious ways.”

The other woman in the crowd was a teacher and did not agree with the Reluctant Seer.

“The kids love their school here and their teachers.”

“No longer will your teachers teach; for knowledge is available to all now. Certificates have no meaning when what can be learned can be picked up by anyone and everyone. The foreigners who have brought their foreign ways with them will return to their foreign lands. The way to life is not through alien doctrines. Birth marriage and death have been manipulated and changed by those who hate the Light. They have mocked the true ways of life. They have mocked the Holy works of God. They have influenced the people away from the teachings. No longer do people fear what is to come; for they think are living inside a manmade world where being nice will exempt them from harm. Local communities do not matter; for democracy does not exist there. I can testify to that. The people in my area have been dominated by the Super Elite. This can be seen where councillors from outwith the local area gang up on other members. What can be said of the Super Elite? They love cars, concrete, and money. They are very cunning. They always make sure a presence will be put forward to oppose them in the chamber; it is a game they play with the

people they represent. They are coming to your area soon to do the same to you. Please do not believe in the Super Elite. Hold onto your parks and beautiful places. There is a storm coming. There will be a day when all seems well here in the good area, but when the storm comes, people will run towards those they have put their trust in. Those they have put their trust in will turn to the world. The blind will lead the blind. They time is coming when you will realise that you have been deceived. Man will turn against his brother. Woman will divorce her sister. No one will believe in anyone anymore. People will confront each other. What once was understood will no longer exist. What will appear will be in the past again, and you will see yourself again as vulnerable as a child. The great lie that people have believed in will no longer be. Young will turn against what their parents: 'You have lead us astray!' they will cry. The young will look beyond the present time and see what is true. Parents will be made to follow God again, through their children. Only those who seek God will be heard to speak the truth once more."

Revelation 14:**12** *Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus*

This time a woman who worked in the grocer's shop across the road from the church asked him:

“What should we do then to change our ways?”

“I urge you my friends to keep the commandments. You have been given the teachings that go back to the beginning. The time has come to turn towards the Light. The time has come to clear out the dark forces that have brought evil to your area. You as a child were given the teachings, but you have not passed them on. Instead you have followed those who are of the world, and the world has become your guide. You must now look and seek the truth.”

“The woman stirred: “Where do I look?”

“You will find it everywhere. No where is out of bounds. Unless you turn to the light you will go

deeper into the world and further from the truth and the world will consume you. There is no one who has not been affected by evil. The only way is to turn to the light and reject the world to escape it. Beware of those who have sweet charm and manners that make you ashamed of who you are. I tell you beware my friends of perfect people. Do not follow them, I tell you they are being nice to the world, for the world is where they live."

The little crowd around the old man just stood and stared at him.

"Tell us about the vision, old man!" someone shouted.

"Hear my words. The time is coming when the people will no longer be able to parade around in their cars. They will have to walk everywhere. They will no longer be able to giveaway their loved ones to others. The family will return, and people will have to look after their own. The state will have to represent you in the place you live. No longer will they communicate with you through the computer,

from a distance. The family will be reborn. This community here will once again help each other. The rich will hideaway, and the poor will be seen every day. This time will be called the end time, though the world will continue. As is the ways of the world, foreign governments will be active wherever you are. You will have to choose between the God of Abraham and the gods of the Internet. Only through Jesus can you meet with God. However, before this happens people will disappear and many will be killed in the struggle against the oppressors. They have come from near and far to deceive you. In the end to survive you will have to hideaway. Then when the time comes you will build the new world again on the old."

A crowd had gathered to listen to the vision. It was a pleasant autumn day and they all knew the winter was not far off.

A young man in the crowd shouted out:

"Tell us about God! How can we escape devious people?"

The Reluctant Seer shut his eyes then he spoke again:

“The only doorway you can go through is through Jesus. The Word of God comes in the Light. Time and space are the same thing. All languages are the same to God. His Word will reveal what is true and what is false to you. The teachings are constantly renewed though Grace, and in the teachings God is revealed. Man must repent and believe the gospel. It is only then that you can follow His teachings. God in man, is man in God. The only thing that the human knows is that God is within man. Of course, some reject this, but others are given the Grace to establish a relationship with the creator. For everyone who hears the Word of God will have a connection between man and God.”

Posted 5/7/21

The art of Crucifixion

Jesus the Son,
here in the world,
He rose for you,
from death to life.

On a hill,
there was a man,
He suffered death,
then rose to life

From death to life
is not faraway,
She tuned herself round,
and saw him standing there

The art of Crucifixion 2

Can you see the innocent man there in your mind's eye, beaten, then made to carry his cross? The first large nail goes into one hand, then another one into the other. The feet next. The agony of this no one can imagine; a criminal's death, maximum torture, where no one can survive.

No one can stand the art of crucifixion; it can be a slow death, depending on the heart of the man hanging there.

It is not all that high the cross where the man is left hanging; his body weight against him now. People are able to pass by and mock him. This is entertainment for some, for others just something to do.

Please remember no loin cloth, that will come later with the Italian artists. People do not like to depict the truth in art, now as then.

The things he said in life can be now thrown back at him with impunity: “Come down and save yourself, Son of God!”

If you look closer you will see the clergy slipping away - job done. They appear, on the scene, then disappear, as they do today. In the crowd, you may see a man heading home; he will return with the spices for the man’s body, as is the custom.

The soldier pierces his side, and water comes forth from the heart, confirming death. The women

who knew the man, hanging there, weep, knowing how things start and how things end.

The Old Minister

The old minister had seen a lot of things in life, but he was getting worried. The reason was that spiritual wickedness had crept into his church. He set out on the Sabbath, to drive it out. As usual, he climbed the stairs to the pulpit:

"My friends, spiritual wickedness is nothing more than human interference between God and man. The eternal words are in the Son of Man; they are not in the world. Woman is from man. The world will seduce all kinds of people – even people inside this church."

“The sign to look for is when you see someone promoting the ways of the world. You see history is always going somewhere – but not so religion.”

“People like to be ahead of the curve, and that is what draws them to new ideas in society. The media only survive due to the fact that they maintain they are ahead of the curve. New ideas are made for those who want them. However, there is nothing new under the sun.”

“I hear stories that women today are led by the latest online gurus, and that men have little or no authority over them. The authority, it seems has been transferred to the media; for they maintain they promote equality and liberation.”
(Laughter)

“In the church wicked spiritual people are active, I have noticed they try to work out what it is that will control their relationships with others by studying them. I have also heard about the introduction of a new world religion; the collective idea is that they can use this against someone who

does not agree with them. This is to kill off the individual spirit. They may point to something that has been given to someone, or something that has been taken away from them. They even hint that there is no salvation, and that the world cannot be overcome. One must appease the world is what they infer. That is what they say to you. They, at all times want to put out yout candle that has been lit for others to see”

“In life, there is spiritual wickedness, you will often find people who appear nice and friendly are exponents of this. They even tell you, there is no devil and there is no hell. Just like the young woman who does not want to be seen as old-fashioned, many people today hide behind the veil of the present culture. Wickedness is rarely spontaneous; for it has been worked upon for many long days and nights. It reflects the dark places of this world, and for a time it is hidden from sight – until it appears. Be not afraid, when it is exposed. You see it is nothing other than human interference between you and God. You have the authority to overcome this.”

The minister came down from the pulpit, and the congregation sang a hymn. Then everyone went to their own home.

The Gardener

Late in the afternoon, working away digging in the garden, the Gardener stopped for a moment what he was doing. He was thinking about what to plant this year. Like the house he lived in, the garden needed a lot done to it. He was a very friendly soul. When anyone passed by his home he always looked up, from working, and greeted them with a smile, or a hello.

“Why don’t you grow flowers this year over by the birch tree?” came a voice from the path.

The voice the Gardener seemed to know, but not

the face. When he cast eyes on him, he thought the man looked friendly enough. He took it he was going to the school, just round the corner from where he lived.

“You mean, down there?” asked the Gardener, and pointed with his shovel for confirmation.

“Yes, down there,” said the man, who then leaned on the fence by the Silver Birch tree.

The Gardener was glad of a chat: for he had been digging for a quite a while now: “Do you know the land around here? he asked the man in his usual cheery way?”

“Yes, you could say that,” came the reply from the passer-by, who then added: “I know that the land we live on is just as mysterious as the sky above us.”

“Ah, you are a prophet, sir,” said the Gardener laughing.

“I suppose I am. You must admit though life certainly throws up surprises. The earth you till hides many things, my friend. Even though concrete is poured on it, and houses, factories and courts are built on it, the world is unknown to those who live on it.”

“It’s funny you should say that; for I am being taken to court.”

“What is your crime, my friend?”

“Apparently, someone thinks I am a bogus operator.”

“You are?”

“Well, that is what someone is saying about me.”

“What is it you do for a living?”

“I write books and music.”

“I take it you sell them to people who like you live on the earth?

“Well, the birds won’t buy them.”

“And someone has objected to the way you are acting?”

“Well, yes, I suppose they have.”

“The case against you is an interesting one.”

“For you, not me.”

“Do you sell other people’s work?”

“No, just my own.”

“I see. Someone obviously thinks you are doing something else?’

“Or nothing.”

“Quite. Is your work authentic?”

“Yes, I am an original.”

“That may be what people are afraid of.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, what is not known is usually excluded for society.”

“Could be, but that doesn’t mean that it cannot become contemporary.”

“Is it a man or woman who accuses you of being a bogus operator?”

“I think both.”

“They work together.”

“Yes, I would say so; they work for the state.”

“Ah, the state has brought a case against you?”

“Yes, they have.”

“They think you are not entitled to some amount of money?”

“That is correct.”

“And are you entitled to this money?”

“On the face of it all small business operators are entitled to apply, if they are selling something and wishing to make a profit from it, and of course organise themselves in a businesslike manner.”

“And you do this?”

“Yes, I do.”

“How will you defend yourself against the claim that you are a bogus operator?”

“I will show them my works, where they are on sale, and reviews of them.”

“Is there a shared risk to this scheme you are involved in?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, the man who is making a lot of money and the man who ends up making no profit, or a small profit, are they both as one?”

“Yes, I think that is right. The scheme is shared.”

“Would you say the earth is even, or uneven?”

“Uneven.”

“In your understanding, who will it be that will judge your case?”

“Well, I believe there are people who sit on the court and make a judgement on others.”

“If you win, I take it you will not be penalised?”

“That’s correct.”

“But if you lose, you will be.”

“Yes, that is correct, I will be financially penalised.”

“The spirit that guides you, and the court that makes a judgement on you, what is that to you?”

“God guides all men, magistrates and juries.”

“I see your garden is being prepared for the summer.”

“Yes, after digging, I think I will plant some seeds over there.”

“I suggest you plant them deep in the soil, my friend, where those who would like to upset them cannot get at them.”

“I will.”

“I wish you well, not only in your court case, but with your garden. Have a good day.”

Living in a good area

Many people who passed by her house wondered who she was. The popular question was not this but: ‘What age do you think she is?’

What can be said here is that the old woman who sits by the window lives alone: for her husband has been dead for many a long year. She has lived in the same small house in the country since she got married.

Unfortunately, she is too old to go out on her own now, but her son they say delivers food to her, and from time to time keeps an eye on her.

If only they knew, for the old woman as she stares out through the living room window onto the green grass has good memories inside her, happy days remembering life as a mother and as a wife.

When she feels down she sings to herself, and once feeling better she reminds herself about her situation: “Nobody out there, and just little old me sitting here.”

It was true that not many people called to see her now. However, one day a tradesman appeared up at the old lady’s house; he had been sent by Mr Crossbow.

It was common knowledge that the aforementioned man owned many of the houses in the local area where she stayed. Mr Crossbow was always in the press. He was always maintaining: ‘This is a good area, you know - all you have to do is walk along the street and look at the cars.’

This was a strange thing to hear: for the woman had never owned a car.

She could see the tradesman, wee Johnny as he was called, was a bit lackadaisical. And it really was not a great surprise to her that before he had downed tools that day she was proved right: for he had damaged her house while trying to fix something upstairs.

As the water poured through the ceiling she had to shout to him to stop what he was doing and come down: for he had obviously damaged the water supply.

When he appeared in the living room he had a daft look on his face, but when he saw the damage he had caused he seemed to sober up. In a rough voice he said to her: “If you write down what I have damaged, missus, I will pay you back next week.”

The old woman knew that it would not come out of his wages, but that his boss Mr Crossbow would

give him the money for it. From articles in the local press she had gleaned that Mr Crossbow was very rich; he received most of his income from the government, through one source or another.

The old woman had watched the local boys grow into men, and she knew that, when they got older, some were better than others at counting.

“I have written down here what you have damaged, and what needs to be fixed,” she said, pointing at the list in her hand, “Please check it, Johnny.”

The young man looked at the list, and laughed, “Yes, it’s all here, missus. I’ll see you get your money all right.”

However, something must have happened that day to Wee Johnny on his journey as he made his way back to see his boss Mr Crossbow.

A few days later the woman heard someone at the door; it was a loud knock. When she opened it a tall man was standing there. He was well dressed, slightly sparse on top. He appeared affable. He had a smile on his round pallid face. However, she noticed his eyes told a different story than his smile did. The common phrase ‘an old fox’ came to mind.

“My name is Mr Crossbow, I have come to pay for the damage the tradesman caused to your house last week,” he said in a cultivated manner.

The old woman remembered where she had put the note, and went and got it. When she returned to the door she read the amount out loud to him.

The Old Fox had a different list in his head, and said to her: “This is not what was on the note Wee Johnny told me about.”

As she wondered about this, and what Wee Johnny was up to, she thought about another local lad she knew in the area. Word had got round the

village that this lad had been thrown out of his house by Mr Crossbow.

With Christmas just round the corner she thought she would ask Mr Crossbow about him: “Do you think the wee lad will get back into his house for Christmas? For it is cold now, and I am sure he will not last the winter sleeping out in the woods, and in the fields.

“He died madam,” said the Old Fox in a deadbeat tone.

The woman was shocked, for she knew that it was not his fault that he could not pay the rent Mr Crossbow was asking him for.

“What happened?”

“Oh some wild boys got a hold of him in the woods and one thing led to another; he perished not long after.

The Old Fox became irritated, it was as if she had no right to ask him these questions, and for a moment or two he just looked straight through her.

Quite forgetting whose door he was at he looked down at his conservative brogue shoes, tapped his left foot twice on the step, then quoted Calvin the philosopher to her: "*Death is the extremity of despair*, madam."

The woman was shocked. She had lived through a world war, but this misanthropy in local people was new to her. She had heard like everybody else what the people were saying in the local area, that although material wealth had increased things had changed and that it was no longer a good area to live in: for men and women were now turning against the vulnerable in society. The reason for the change was that they wanted to become rich. These people she had heard were mainly men and women who worked for Mr Crossbow, the man who owned many of the houses in the local area.

A man who had cut her hedge in the summer had warned her about them, when the topic had come up in the conversation: “That lot they will do anything to cheat you out of what is due to you - they will even push you to the ground if you give them a chance.”

It was well known that the party members he was referring to were every day spreading rumours and lies and stories that were made up to discredit people they did not like. Even though the party members did not go around saying bad things about the poor people in the good area no one believed them when they said: ‘Oh yes, of course we help the vulnerable in society.’

She looked down at the list again: “The amount is not right, the tradesman promised to pay for everything he damaged - he has not told you what he told me.”

The Old Fox slowly opened his wallet, and as he held out the money, he smiled at her. They were

crisp new notes; they looked so colourful too in his big white hand.

“I’m sorry that this is all that we are offering you madam. You can take it or leave it.”

“What is happening to people in this area?” she wondered. She knew she had no husband now to defend her. She thought to herself: “My husband knew this man, but now he has passed away this man comes to my door and acts like my master.”

“Don’t you know people will visit me at Christmas and see the mess you have made of my house?”

The old woman knew that if she took half the money it would not be enough to fix the damage? And there would be no more after that. She would have to pay for half the damage, Mr Crossbow’s worker had caused. It was bizarre. She had always paid her taxes too.

The Old Fox smiled at her again. Up until this point she had not wanted to believe what people were saying that area where she lived had changed, and that the people who were in authority had lost their way. It was clear to see that they were now only serving the great and the good in society, and that all others were to be forgotten about.

She knew there would be more evictions after Christmas, and there would be more cheating people out of what were owed to them, by the men and women who worked for Mr Crossbow.

She had heard that local trade was to be brought to an end. Mr Crossbow's friends were to be given all the contracts to supply the markets, and once that had started everyone knew they would make sure thereafter that no one would get in on the game. Local craftsmen and women would soon find themselves out of work. It would not be long until some of them would be wandering around the woods like the local lad who had recently perished: for they too would soon be tricked out of their houses by bureaucrats who worked for Mr Crossbow.

It was well known that the man whom the people had appointed as their local representative for this area had become influenced by Mr Crossbow: for he saw in him all his dreams. He was called the Skull by the local people who lived in the village. He was new to politics. People thought him funny at first: for he had the image of a Jesuit priest, as he strolled from meeting to meeting. It was the way he stared at people, as if he should be greeted as such that made him funny. He did not appear to be sympathetic to widows, local trade or vulnerable people, Mr Crossbow was exploiting. Consequently the protection of men, women and children had not been protected in the good area since his arrival.

Some folk made a joke of it and said that although he acted like a priest he did not bring any religion to his meetings with him. Although this was comical, it was not good for what was called by some ‘the good area’ to have such a representative.

Many people in this local area could not take it any more and had become UP’s (youpees) Unrepresented People.

Although they left their names on the voting register they reckoned that if the elected member was like that, namely that after being voted in he or she just did what he wanted to, and did not represent them. There was no way of making him do so, therefore they would opt out and make it known that although the local area had a representative he did not represent them. “I am an UP!” Even the local gardener had confessed this to the old woman after cutting her hedge.

Apparently a local man had tried to straighten the elected member out. The elected member got such a fright that he alerted the police, thinking that the man who had waved his fist at him was, as they say in the local area, going to punch his lights out. In fact, all he was doing was showing him the sign that people all around the world use in defiance of elected representatives, or dictators, who have become corrupted and turn their backs on the people: ‘Stop representing vested interests and start representing the people who elect you!’ he was told.

In a wider context it had been even said that democracy was coming to an end: ‘Politicians are careerists now,’ people said, and many people who lived in this area now took that for granted. ‘Once they get in they just do what they like.’

There was a lot of truth in that: the umbilical cord had been cut a long time ago, and it was generally felt that only the media now could get them sacked or change their opinions on political matters. The people had not fought to maintain the democratic right of having an elected member to represent them. They had let it slip.

The area may have changed, due to the fact that people with strange ideas were now exploiting it, but the old lady knew that time has a way of sorting things out.

The old woman knew that life was a strange thing; it was not something you could ever predict or understand by reading a book. She was certain of one thing: Light always overcomes the darkness.

The old woman did not take the money from the Old Fox's hand, but instead she said to herself: "I will have a word with Wee Johnny the next time I see him, and we will get it sorted out," and she shut the door in his face.

The old lady tidied her house as best she could; she covered the damage with tinsel and cards, and got ready for Christmas.

Someone had told her that this year: 'Christmas was for the criminals,' it was so funny to hear people say that for she knew Christmas was for everyone saints and sinners. Some people must have thought Christmas was only for good people and upright people like Mr Crossbow and that is why they had said such a thing.

The old woman knew that all wrongdoing was done in ignorance and therefore involuntary. She imagined the Skull, Mr Crossbow, at a Christmas party somewhere, sitting together, looking very glum.

‘Ah, there’s nowt so queer as folk,’ she said to herself and laughed.

After she had tidied the house she sat down at the table by the window and, as she opened the box of Christmas cards, she sighed and said to herself: ‘I wonder who I should send my first card to.’

Merry Christmas to you all

Imitator

Graham Hood was the local MP. He was a good lad; he played a good game of golf, and still kept in touch with university friends. In the late 1980's, he married the vicar's daughter, joined the church, and to his credit dutifully turned up for the main events, like communion and the Session meeting.

At work, he learned that to do nothing was better than to do something. The legislators made the laws and everyone had to live within them. His job was to sympathise with people, and point them in the right direction, but not to get involved with them, and their problems. Anyway, everything could be solved by an email, these days: 'I have referred your case to this or that agency,' and that was that.

It was Christmas time and to be fair Graham always enjoyed himself at this time of the year.

However, sitting in the office today with Jamie, his PA, he couldn't help but wonder aloud: "Why are people sleeping on the streets?"

He had read in the local paper that celebrities were gaining publicity by imitating them.

Jamie stared at him.

Baffled by it all, Graham Hood exclaimed: "I mean, what is going on?"

His PA had thought about this too. And due to the fact that this was a time of the year when people were normally in a good mood, he replied: "The causes are simple to understand, really."

Graham looked over at him and sneered: "Well, you had better tell me what they are then, young fellow."

“Social exclusion, no work, no hope of work, estranged from family and so called friends, sanctioned by authorities, unable to challenge legislation, eviction, lust for a free life, drugs and alcohol addiction, foreign enemies, no hope, no love, head not in a good place.

“I see,” said Graham quite surprised.

There was a pause between them, as the words sank deep into the elected member’s soul. Suddenly, he got up off his swivel chair: “Well, Jamie, I am off to the Christmas party.

Even the down and outs enjoy themselves at this time of the year.”

Happy Christmas

Posted 15/12/17

Adam and his mother

Adam was a nice young man – everyone could see that. He was well-liked at school. Now that he was working in town, it was the same.

People did notice though since his mother had passed away, he was not as talkative as he was before. If truth be told, Adam was troubled by the world. Women, young and old, were nice, but he did not think they were what you say honest with their emotions with him.

They stopped when he wanted them to continue. They ignored him when he wanted to engage them. They cut off when he felt they should stay with him in conversation. Some were kind, but many were hidden. He could see that modern women hid behind strange things, like work and jewellery. Very few

were open. For the first time, he noticed that some women even tried to control him. The ones who did this, who appeared nice, were the most bizarre.

Adam did not know what to do now that his mother was gone. At night, he lay in bed alone and wondered about all of this. He missed seeing her in the evening and in the morning.

At times, he felt her spirit near to him, that was lovely when this happened. He could in some way communicate with her – it was strange. He did not tell anyone about this, though.

The other strange thing was that he felt places were important to him, now that she was gone. Places she had liked going to:shops, even bus routes. He loved to look at old photographs of her, and the places she had been to.

Whenever he looked at them, the places and the stories related to them came alive again in his young mind. However, there was one mysterious postcard she left him. It was of an old mansion. It was a curious thing to look at. He knew she went there, while working for a rail company, when she was young. It said on the postcard that it was a convalescent home, in a place called Llandudno.

He remembered her saying that the woman in charge of the hotel noticed that she looked tired, and sent her off there for a break.

Apparently, the rail company, who owned the hotel, owned this place too. He also had a photo of her outside the convalescent home with a group of women her age; she was standing in the middle of the crowd on the steps. Adam researched the building on the Internet, and found that it was now a home for children, run by Jewish women.

To him, it looked like a small castle. As he lay in bed that night, Adam felt if he went there he would sense his mother’s spirit, even more than before.

As luck would have it, he was on holiday from his clerical job in town. The next day, Adam went to the station early in the morning and bought tickets to go to Llandudno.

He arrived at the seaside resort around 2pm, in the afternoon. From the station, he asked a good fellow the direction to his hotel. The man's phone was not working, so he took Adam to his office, not faraway, and there checked the address on Google on his computer. Adam soon found out the hotel he had booked on the phone was not close by. It was a good walk to West Shore Beach, as it was called, where the hotel was situated, but he did not mind. The weather was fine. When he got to the hotel the young proprietor checked him in.

After walking through the town, Adam could see that there were many small hotels all over the place, especially on the street he was staying. After handing over his documents, Adam took the old postcard out of his pocket. He showed it to the man at the reception, who ran the B&B, who was not that much older than he was.

“Oh, yes, that is on Abbey Road – it is not that far from here. You go along the coastal road, and when you come to the sign that says ‘no through road’, take the path down towards the sea, and you will see it there.”

The man then handed the postcard back to Adam. He did not seem interested as to why Adam wanted to visit it, though he did say after it had left his possession: “It is now a home for children. No one knows who the people are though who run it.”

“It sounds mysterious,” replied Adam.

Although weary from his journey, and the walk to the hotel, Adam, after putting his case in the room, headed in the direction the fellow had told him to go. It was a nice day. The sun was shining and although there were one or two dark clouds floating in the Welsh sky, they did not look threatening. As he walked along the coastal path what he did notice was how strong the wind was coming from the sea. This made him think about his mother, and how she loved to be by the sea. The

fresh air always made her smile, especially when she got close to the water or was in a boat.

Not far along the coastal road, he met a man and stopped and chatted with him. Adam, as he produced the postcard again, asked him if he was born here. He wasn't, but his wife was. However, he knew the property and confirmed where it was situated.

In fact, he had just lost his wife. They chatted for a few moments. Adam thought the time he estimated to get to the property was longer, due to his age. After about 15 minutes walking, he caught sight of one of the towers of the building featured in the postcard. He checked it again to make sure: "Yes, that is it."

The problem was that the slip road, the man in the hotel told him about, led to a large modern electronic gate. When he got to that gate, he pressed the intercom. Adam could see there was a camera on the panel, and whoever they were could see him standing there, from inside the building. Adam loved music; he noticed the music the buzzer played back

was the kind you heard when someone escaped from a prison or detention centre. No one answered his call.

“What should he do? If I climb over the fence, I will no doubt end up in the local police station in town having to explain myself.”

Presently, he wandered back down the road. The man he met on the way up mentioned to him that this was ‘millionaire’s row’. He did not doubt it. As he walked on, Adam remembered that he had passed a woman, with a sunhat on, working in her garden. When he got to her house, he looked over the fence, and there at the edge of a lovely big garden was the woman still tending to her rose bushes. Adam shouted over to her:

“I am trying to get to see the big house next to yours. Do you know anything about it?”

When she looked up, he could see she was a kind elderly lady. It was plain to see she loved the

land and being out in her large garden tending to it. Her stocky husband not far off was mowing the lawn, on the opposite side of the grass from where she was.

Adam offered her the postcard through the fence. The kind elderly woman gingerly came up the hill to take it from him.

“My mother came here to stay when she was young, many years ago.”

The woman smiled, as she looked at the old postcard. Then she said in a welcoming tone: “Come in,” before handing the postcard back to him through the fence.

The kind lady then suddenly remembered that she would have to go down to the house to flip the switch that would open the electric gate, where she lived.

“What a difference a few yards makes,” thought Adam, as he moved towards her property.

It did not take long for the gate to open, and Adam walked forward to meet her. Her husband saw him coming down the path, but he never stirred until the woman came back up from the house and told him about the petition. “I am going to take him down to the front; he may see the old house from there.”

As they walked, she looked over towards the old convalescent home, where Adam’s mother once went to: “We are not sure what is going on in there now. They are very secretive,” she said in an undertone.

Making their way round the side of her house, she alerted him to the latest problem she was having at the moment. “We are trying to keep the goats from getting in: for they eat everything. We have put fences up everywhere to stop them - but still they come.”

The stone path led to a wooden staircase, not long built. Adam could see this would take him to the shore. She was wise not to go down with him: for it was steep and dangerous. As he went, she shouted after him: “See that plateau over there, you may be able to see the house from there!”

After the wooden steps ended, Adam gently climbed, step by step, over the large rocks, until he reached the jetsam and flotsam washed up on the stony beach.

“Don’t disturb the oystercatchers,” she petitioned him from the top of the hill.

It was plain to see the birds were not amused by him or her. Just at that moment the hundred or so flew up into the air. However, he noticed that the three Cormorants sitting on one rock not faraway stayed put. Adam walked along to the plateau, it was obvious he would have to climb up the hill to see if he could see the old convalescent home from there. He knew this was the view on the postcard from the sea.

Up he climbed until he got to an old gate; after some difficulty, he opened it. Then up a little further there was another iron gate to get through. This one he could see had been jammed with a long iron pole onto the fence. After trying to dislodge it, Adam could see there was no way through. They obviously did not want visitors. Disappointed, he went back down.

Once on the shore again, Adam could see the kind elderly woman standing above the rocks there waiting for him.

Before climbing up the hill towards her, he looked over the sea in the direction towards Ireland, and once again felt the strong wind against his face.

Adam picked up a stick, washed from the shore, then he made his way to the top of the rocky hill again. He remembered he used to do this kind of thing when he was a boy, when living in the country.

At the top of the hill, the kind elderly woman greeted him. Adam told her about his adventure but had to admit: “There was no way through to the old mansion.”

Just before they made their way back round to the front of her house, Adam stopped and from a distance looked over the hedge at the place his mother had visited, when she was a young lady. As he stood quite still, he thought of the photograph of her outside the home, and how lovely she looked.

She seemed so different from the other women in the picture. Adam knew from other photos that she made her own clothes.

The day the photo was taken she wore a pinafore skirt, woolen top, and beads round her neck. Her hair was thick and windswept; she looked so happy. Adam knew that in every crowd there is one person who always stands out. They seem to catch the eye of the viewer, for whatever reason.

At that moment her spirit soared within him. He knew this image was from a time before he was born. He wondered how she got on during the day, when staying here. She, like him, must have had to walk into the town of Llandudno: for then, as now, there were no buses that went this way from this area.

The kind elderly woman could see Adam was now walking with a stick, but she did not know that it was the emotion within him that was making him feel unsteady. As she looked at the stick in his hand, she asked him: “Are you tired; I will give you a lift into town, if you want.”

“No, it is fine.”

“You want to come in for a cup of tea?’

He could see they were a nice couple, living out their lives beside the sea. He waved them goodbye, then he was on his way again, back down the road towards the town. As he meandered, Adam looked at

the strange landscape directly in front of him. He had never seen hills like that before; they were like little volcanoes.

The stick was a great thing to have; he knocked it once or twice against the ground in defiance of his tiredness, and the unseen forces that wanted to weaken him.

People who were coming along the coastal path looked and stared at him. He knew that no one these days carried a stick, except pilgrims. But that is what Adam was: he was a pilgrim of the past, searching for the spirit of his mother. He may have wanted to stand on that very step where his mother had once stood when the picture was taken of her, but the atmosphere of the place, and the adventure, somehow brought his mother back to life inside him again. This made him happy and content.

However, as he walked back to town, the strangest thing came into his mind. It was true, was it not: the first man in life had no mother. God created Adam.

Posted 23/10/17

The Great Man and the mountain

At home, he was not thought of as any better, or worse, than anyone else. However, when abroad, people could see that he was a great man.

To give you an example, while visiting Innsbruck, the Great Man came across a strange sub station called Congress, located in the east end of the city. Without hesitation, he went down the escalator and enquired what went on there within the station. A happy young worker, who was pinning something to a noticeboard outside on the concourse, noticed the Great Man standing there. The worker could see that he was a great man by the way he looked at him.

The worker told the Great Man: “Sir, the Hungerburg Funicular, which is standing over there, will take you to the summit of the Alps. From here it goes to Lowenhaus, onto Alpenzoo, Hungerburg, Seegrube, then to Hafelekar.”

Without hesitation, the Great Man decided to ascend the mountain. He went to the window by the counter and purchased a ticket. He knew that this ticket would take him above 7,400ft.

The first change was at Hungerburg. And when the Great Man got out there, he visited the church. Inside the chapel, he met a woman from Vienna. By the way, he looked at the crucifixion painting, by Max Weiler, she could see he was a Great Man.

Once outside the church, trying to impress him, she told him that she had already been to the summit. The Great Man smiled at her and, not long after this, he boarded the cable car and he too went towards the sky.

It was not long until the Great Man was above the airplanes coming into land below him. At the summit the Great Man looked across in the direction of Italy and Germany, then once more down at the city of Innsbruck. The land was now laid out before him like a map. The Great Man smiled to himself when he thought about all the things going on at that moment, down below him.

Thereafter, he watched the shepherds move their goats down the hill, and he listened to the sounds the bells made from their movements. The paragliders looked as if they were having fun too, as they moved over the land below him. Many hikers and bikers were moving up and down the mountain.

An American couple beside him wanted to go right up to the large stone, over to the right of where they stood. As they walked, he chatted with them and, when they reached the stone, he met a girl there who had taken his picture early on in the day. She too knew he was a great man, just by the way he smiled at her.

It was soon time for the Great Man to descend the mountain. Like all great men, he wondered what he should take back down with him?

The next day he did not feel so great. It came to his attention that he had been affected by mountain sickness. At breakfast table, he spoke with an Italian woman. His Italian was not effected by where he had been, but his body was. It was a rainy day; mercifully he could take it easy.

On the Sunday, the Great Man went to a church in town where they sang not only hymns, but songs from Mozart. Of course the Great Man knew the composer. Not only that he was staying in the same hotel, as he had done: 1769.

On Monday, the Great Man feeling better went to a spa in the hills, and there sat with Austrians and Germans, men and women of all ages. He even made friends with a young lady from the Czech Republic.

The next day he left the mountains. When he returned home, the Great Man knew he would be treated the same way as before - just like everyone else. After climbing the mountain, the Great Man knew that this was a blessing, rather than a curse.

Posted 25/9/17

Breakdown at Newlands Corner

Late one evening the author left her car in the country, in a ditch somewhere, near Gilford, a place called Newlands Corner. And from there she somehow made her way to London. Due to her state of mind, she knew she would have to apply fiction to real life just to get through the next few months, maybe years.

At Waterloo station, there was a nice colourful poster on the wall advertising the spa town of Harrogate. What is known is that on the 4/12/26, she boarded a train from Kings Cross, just after 11 am, for the aforementioned town. Dukes and Duchesses went to Harrogate, why not her?

Although she had left her coat and driving license in the car, she had plenty of money on her. She would try to escape from whatever it was that was bringing her down.

The writer chose the hotel with the strange name Hydropathic. She thought it would surely do her good to go there. In any event, the Christmas festive season was not far away. There were plenty of taxis outside the station that would take her right to the door, and she could slip in without being noticed. She knew things were not right with her; she was having what they call a breakdown.

Due to her state of mind, the writer could not put the past few days into any order: how she had travelled, or indeed the time it had taken to do so. It was natural to think that the spa at Harrogate would help her in some way. Yes, it seemed a good idea; she would rest up here and try to recover.

Everyone knows there is little sympathy for a breakdown in life; it makes no real sense to people going about their business. The soul being born

again is nonsense to most folk. The doctor is of no use, for this condition can certainly not be understood by medical men or women. Authors and poets have a better chance of helping those in need of recovery.

Anyway, she signed in under a pseudonym, her husband's lover's name. Once in her room, she put the photo of her little girl on the dressing table. She would keep out of the way. Yes, it seemed a good place to hideout. Slowly, she got into a rhythm of sorts.

After a few days, she went downstairs and sat alone. Life, or what had been her life, had now gone from her; she knew that much. One thing was for sure: her husband did not love her. He was off with someone else. His mistress she knew. The woman after all was his golfing partner. Like others before her she knew the bond was broken when she realised that he belonged not to her, but to another; it was this that surely made her spiral from a happy life into a dark void. Nothing any more seemed to make any

sense to her. If someone who had vowed to love you could betray you, how could you trust another?

Life she could see was going on all around her, inside the hotel, even if the characters seemed different to her now.

The death of love was fatal to the senses: a breakdown was not only hard to bear, but to understand. Life seemed lost, yet there was something there apart from despair, but what was it? If she could only keep going, she would get through it. The days passed without incident, but then someone spotted her.

The two men, who played in the band, alerted the manager and the manager alerted the police. Soon there were newspaper men outside waiting for her. She felt like a fox being hunted. Everyone wanted to know why she had disappeared without trace. Did she not know there were thousands out looking for her, dragging pools, searching byways? One newspaper was so intrigued by the writer's disappearance that they had hired a train to sweep

her all the way from the spa in Harrogate, to their office in London. This is where the exclusive story would be gotten out of her, no doubt in some damp office just off Fleet Street.

Her mother had not long ago passed away. The world for the writer had no one in it to help her – certainly not press men.

One morning a man approached her table, he was with the manager, whom she had seen on arrival. It took some time to take things in. She knew that she would have to go with him. Her husband would leave her no doubt soon afterwards. Making a scene would be no use to anyone. The union may have been broken, with this man, but something made her go forward, and not down into the abyss. She knew she would have to make a new life for herself, somehow, somewhere.

Posted after visiting Harrogate and York, 15 August, 2017

Stonehenge understood

After the service at Salisbury Cathedral, on Sunday 6/8/17, I met a group near the train station and we all decided to visit Stonehenge. Spanish, and South Americans made up the majority of my new friends. We arrived Stonehenge mid-afternoon, by taxi mini bus, at the information centre.

The group decided not to wait in the long queue to buy a ticket for the official tour. By doing this, we knew we would not be able to jump on the buses that ferry visitors up and down from the centre to the ancient site. In short: we decided to walk it. After some confusion, and an angry word from a Marshall, (after we strayed onto the official tour path), we

found the right of way, next to the road, and moved off once again.

The weather was fine; it looked a lovely walk. Someone said the distance was about 2km. Halfway along this country road, I was the first one to spot the ancient stones through the trees. It was an intriguing image. When my friends saw this, we knew we had not that far to go now.

At the end of this long straight road, our little group stopped for a moment and watched the organised tour guides at work. They were taking people off the buses, and ushering them up towards the hill. Having chosen to go it alone, we followed another right of way path – this time to the left – that we could see would take us round to the side of the stones. The stones having been recently ringed-fenced, meant that visitors – no matter what direction they come from – could only get so far. Finally, after about half an hour walking, we arrived at the ancient site.

It was a strange sight to see all the visitors around the stones. Due to the crowds, the mystery of the ancient site that I saw through the trees had disappeared. What was there in front of us now was a theme park. People were taking pictures, phoning friends, and standing talking to each other.

To understand Stonehenge, one must look beyond the stones: for the stones are aligned to the stars and to the planets. The universe moves in a mysterious way. That is the reason why ancient people came to this spot to celebrate. They wrote mythical stories about man and his destiny from looking at the stars. They knew that at certain times planets come together, and at other times they move apart.

Even today stories from our world can be offered up, then brought back down again to earth. For no time exists in space: it is not manmade. Everyone can look up at the stars and dream and wonder what this world is all about. Indeed the light from a star may tell you something about your life.

Hence the reason horoscopes are brought back from this view.

Yes, what lies beyond these stones is the real mystery of the human race. The first people to look beyond this world were the Jews. Jesus went even further:

John 18:36, *My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.*

posted 9/8/17

Holy Island

There was great excitement on the Holy Island, when I visited it, 5/7/17. The reason for this was that archaeologists had found evidence of an old site near the shore. They reckoned it was the oldest church on the island.

They were actively working on it when I passed by them. The man who looked in charge of this dig would not give the tourists a date – that would hopefully follow on in time, he said. What is known about the history of the Holy Island is that monks came from Iona, to this island, and it is here that the first bible in the UK was produced, late 7th or early 8th century; now it lies in the British Library.

Knowing that the tide can come in and surround this island, it gives you the feeling of uncertainty. Yet, you feel secure when you are on it: for it is a lovely peaceful island. Of course, the danger is being caught, either walking or driving, back to the mainland. I was told by a portly local man, who wore a Tee shirt, *The Fat Lazy One*, 'They don't have a policeman here anymore; they got rid of him a few years ago.'

Another local man who lived close to the mainland stopped his grass cutting machine, and spoke with me over the fence. He lived right on the edge of the island. Like many others, he has witnessed many turbo cars getting stuck, and needing help, after the tide caught them out.

I suppose most people will have heard the song: 'Meet me on the corner', by the band Lindisfarne, and maybe that is the first time they will have heard the name. He informed me: 'We never called it Lindisfarne; it was always the Holy Island for us.'

Presently, I headed towards the castle, and as I walked, I noticed the clouds were strange, lying just above the horizon line. An old sailor, now cleaning park benches in this area, told me that he could tell the way the wind was blowing by looking up at them. As we both gazed from the sky to the sea, he revealed that the whitefish had sadly gone from here, and that the little boat that was coming in was carrying oysters. Our conversation thereafter was interrupted from time to time by seals popping up to the surface. Like a synchronised event, the seals would have a look around, then dive back down again.

I arrived on the Holy Island around 11 am, and I knew I would not be able to return back to Berwick-upon-Tweed, until five in the evening. This was due to the fact that the bus timetable was under the authority of the moon. ‘The tide will soon be in,’ said the old sailor.

He then pointed to the best vantage point – the beacon on the hill – where I could go and see it. He, like his father, knew all about the Pilgrims way, and

pointed to the poles in the water. He also showed me other objects on the land that were of interest to him too.

‘The old fisherman used to line them up to chart their course back to the harbour. We did this before the computer age; now they use GPS.’

We were standing not far from the castle. I could see that no one was going in there. The reason for that was that it was being refurbished. I walked from here along the shore, to the spot he had pointed to at the harbour. And as I walked, I noticed the island was busy with travellers, but the thing that stood out for me was not the foreign faces, visiting the Holy Island, but that the majority of people had brought their dogs along with them.

In the afternoon, I found out over a coffee that, on this part time island, they still have quaint customs. When a man is married two men carry his wife over an old stone opposite the Priory, outside the church. The men on this island also fire guns over the heads of the newlyweds to wish them luck.

It was nice to hear that the people on the Holy Island have kept their old traditions going. I was told the majority of people today live out their lives here peacefully. The people who come to live in timeshares, B&B's, or apartments, are known to them, but they are not part of the mystery of the Holy Island. I could see, the mystery lies outside of itself: for the tie to the mainland is never broken, it always returns to it.

Mead is still made on the Holy Island; lovely wine with honey. I was given a sample in the Lindisfarne-mead centre.

There I spoke with many tourists, and thereafter visited the other shops around the island. When the time came, I bought a local beer from Alnwick, for the journey back home, then headed for the bus to leave this tidal island, before it was surrounded by water once again.

On the way there, a wee nun from Germany stopped for a chat, and before departing gave me a card taken from a series of 12 texts by M. Basilea

Schlink: *‘All that God brings into your life will end in blessing, for He is compassionate.’*

I can record here that visitors that day to the Holy Island had been lucky; the weather was fine for a day out. From the bus, I could see some figures in the distance were walking it back to the mainland. The two Russian girls, I travelled back with were like me; they were happy, for the trains they had booked had fallen in with the crossing times.

Now we were all returning home again; they were heading for Bristol and me back to Glasgow.

posted 9/7/17

Unreal Trek

On arriving at Lanark train station, I walked outside, and after a few minutes stopped a good fellow and asked him how to get to the new town. Having had a friend in Motherwell, many years ago, I immediately understood him.

There is a way with Lanarkshire folk, I would say, only understood by knowing someone who still lives there, or has lived there. I guess it is the same with Glasgow folk. He was retired now, and was slightly depressed at the way Lanark town was going: quite a few empty shops near the station emphasized the point he was trying to make.

This local man had great affection, however, for Glasgow. He remembered fondly the Barrowland dancehall, and other venues in the city. His early life had been spent in the army in Germany. We walked and talked, and when we got to the point where two roads appeared in front of us, he told me to take the one on the right and follow it. He assured me that at the end of it, I would find the new town.

It was a nice walk, and the weather was fine. I soon found the turnoff to take me towards the river; and after passing the large car park, on the left, I found the right path to take me down to the World Heritage Site. It was a strange sight, I first beheld. This was due to the upgraded buildings: for they looked new when of course, in fact, they were old.

In the Visitors Centre, there was a reconstruction of a room of the past, and it gave me a good idea of how people lived here at one time, when it was a town that produced cotton.

The woman inside the centre, on tour from England, liked it too. I asked her if there was a trade

name for the blanket on the bed: for we had one like that at home, when I was young: cream coloured with two thin black stripes across it.

In the main centre, across the road, the receptionist there filled in the gaps for me: “New Lanark was founded as a cotton spinning village in 1785, by David Dale. Everyone left after the mills shut in 1968.”

“What was the reason?” I asked, “economic, social?” she wasn’t sure, but the place became a ghost town not long after.

I spent a couple of hours in New Lanark, and marvelled at the Falls of Clyde. And as I walked along witnessed the way it still generated power today from the river. On the day I was there, few visitors were about, 20/6/17.

Nevertheless, I chatted to people who were sitting or standing here and there, outside of the old buildings. The writer A Gray who brought forward a

novel named Lanark, in the enterprising eighties, (the central character is called by that name) has his paintings on posters at the station, even on the train. This adds to the unreal nature of the place: for his work has, as far as I can see, no real representation of the place that I was now walking through.

Whatever New Lanark was – some say a utopia – has gone forever. What remains is a ghost town – a nice ghost town.

In fact, I would say it is like a Hollywood film set, ready for a director to arrive to produce his new film. Possible working title: Unreal Trek. Synopsis: two time travellers, Captain Kirk and Spock are beamed down here. They will come out of an alley; for they have been transported to the Scottish town of Lanark to alter what it was that killed off the place in the hope it will continue to thrive.

You get the picture.

Cut! Take two.

I made my way back from the World Heritage Site towards the train station. It is quite a steep climb back up towards the road. The elderly I thought were right to pause at different places to rest before they moved off again. At the top of the hill, I noticed a group of school kids, in their first year, heading back up to their coach. As we got near to the carpark, one young girl, who did not like the climb, turned and said to her teacher: “I hate my life!”

The teacher who was female, young, and like the girl from the local area, looked to others around her to share the joke.

Presently, she replied, as if she was speaking now to a grown up: “You are not old enough to say that, Mrs”

This funny comment seemed to bring my day trip to an end. New Lanark, to me, was unreal, but I enjoyed it nonetheless.

posted 25/6/2017

The Young Beggar girl, at Clarkston toll

Just before going down the lane this morning to the station, I spotted a young beggar girl over to the left of Tesco. She was not directly outside the store. Even though she was not sitting outside the shop, I wondered how long she would last there. I also wondered if I should go over and speak to her.

For whatever reason, I was not led to do so. It was a nice morning; usually, I stand under the fan inside the ticket office in winter to get a heat, before the train arrives. Today, I was in good time and, after a few moments, I went back outside and up onto the main street again. It was no surprise to me that there was a police van there, now blocking my view of the young beggar girl.

My guess was that she was Romanian, and had been sent by her masters to the rich area to get some money. I knew she had a cardboard plaque with her. From her face, I also thought that she could speak little English. Naturally, the police had by this time told her the law about begging. There was suddenly a shriek, then a continuous wail followed. She was off and running, past the supermarket, the charity shops, and she was soon at the lights, where she marked time for a moment, before she crossed the road. The bobbies, like me, looked on, but they gave no chase. I think they admired the natural scene. I guess this is now a daily occurrence for them; it used to be in the old days moving drunks, and neds on, now it is illegal immigrants.

The Young Beggar girl's wail told me she was terrified. The wail never stopped, it was her way, like many others before, to petition the world around her, that she was in trouble. She must have thought she was going to be jailed, or worse deported. The way she ran was strange; she was not the athletic type. It was as if she was running through a crowd, inside a vacuum. From her movement, I could tell

the noise she kept making seemed to protect her from the danger she was in. She was soon at old Bonis cafe, then out of sight.

posted 24/2/17

Pilgrimage to Iona

The kind woman working for the local taxi company helped me; after I told her the opening time of the station, she said:

‘We will pick you up at 4.40 am.’

On the arranged day, Queen Street station was very quiet indeed; it had not long opened. I could see that the 5.20 train was standing there on platform 6. After a chat with a rail worker standing inside – who had just finished his shift at Central Station – we boarded the train. Apart from the rail worker, the only other passenger in the first carriage was a young reveller. I could see he had been up all night enjoying himself. He was tired; he fell fast asleep as

soon as he sat down. With three people in the first carriage, on time the train left the station without much ceremony.

Outside the train the sunlight was lovely and bright. It was very early in the morning. I had made it; we were on our way northwards towards our destination: Oban. For me it was onwards towards Mull, then Iona.

Life never really got going again until we reached Dalmally, just before eight o'clock. It was a very unusual station, decorated with all sorts of secondhand items. Many school kids came on board here, and soon we were on our way again. At Oban, I found myself in amongst a group of American tourists at the port, inside a cafe, and chatted with them.

'You have never been to America?'

'No, I have never been there.'

On board the ferry from Craignure on Mull, I met a German woman, heading for a mysterious island. I could see she was like me, adventurous. She said she always came to Scotland every year for her holidays. This time she was on her way to Staffa. As we chatted, the way new friends do, I could not help but notice the landscape around us; it was quite beautiful and unreal. There was something strange about the hills and mountains in this area: even though I had not seen them before, I knew they were from the land I was born in.

I went down below just before reaching the harbour, and there chatted to a retired man. He, I could see, was someone who had went to church, for most of his life. He said he had not been to Iona for a long time.

This man gave me a hint on what to expect on arrival: ‘The powers who be’, he said, ‘have ring fenced the Abbey, and are now charging people, not only to enter the building, but to walk on the sacred soil.’

Presently, we all headed for our respected buses. I knew my bus would take me to the other side of Mull, then to another ferry, and then a short hop over to Iona. I was one of the first on the bus, and sat by the window downstairs. He was a very interesting man, you know, the bus driver who stood outside and greeted the passengers. I could see by the way he replied to me, and others, he had hidden talent. As I sat there by the window downstairs, I saw the German lady go past making her way to the bus in front of us, that would take her to her favourite Scottish island.

Once everyone was on board our bus, we moved off. The bus driver soon revealed his hidden talent, not just to me, but to everyone else: he started giving a running commentary. The only problem was that his audio system was not configured correctly; it was too loud. He sounded like an angry man stuck inside an oil tanker. Someone complained. I tried to help, advising him to move the mic away from his mouth. It didn't really work and I had to put my earphones on to stop harsh frequencies jarring my ears. It helped, and like the others I listened to him

and what he had to say. He was a lad all right; he knew everything that was going on in the island: who was falling out with who, the name of the sheep, where the golden eagles had their nests, where Hitler's old girlfriend use to stay, who really composed the hymn, *Morning has broken*, and where the dead were buried.

Halfway round this one track island, he asked us all to look over to some bushes in front of a cottage: 'This is where the Lady minister grows her tea,' he said. I must admit here that I have experienced both. I looked and wondered what was about to follow. Apparently, the First Minister of Scotland, and the last president of the USA had been here just last month, and paid her a visit. He was a lucky driver; for he had managed to get in on the act, and he got himself a packet of tea. He reported that the substance the woman grew was selling for an outrageous price in the marketplace.

'Only the rich can afford it,' he boasted to us. He did not though give it a good review.

We got there on time for the ferry. However, it was full up, and the people like me who had traveled there on the bus from the other side of Mull, were told we would have to wait for it to return again.

This was a blessing.

As the ferry left, I stood next to a man and woman who were from Anglesey. There was not a cloud in the ocean sky. The colours were from heaven: beautiful, vibrant and serene.

The white sand by the harbour, the turquoise sea between the island and the mainland. This vision brought the quote to life for me from the book about the man who was given the island we were all going to visit: '*to look at the world caught in one ray of sunlight*…' was an unforgettable experience. I could not really understand why people were not completely overcome, like me, by it. Some made comments, but few I could see were high on the broad brushstrokes before us.

This is the area I knew where St Columba came to. There must have been a first time for him too, to see this. This man brought Christianity to Scotland. He was liked by poets, as well as Picts. He was someone who did not hold fast to Rome. It was here that his ministry gave others an understanding of what this life was about, and moreover what was to come. For those interested in dates: St Columba died 9 June, 597, I visited the island on the 8 June, 2017.

After landing, I headed for the Abbey. There, I stood in the queue, and when I got to the desk, I asked the young lady why it was I was barred from going forward, unless I gave her some money. The people who employed her had trained her well: those who did not agree with the policy of pay and enter should go to the website and complain there. I went for a cup of coffee.

As I wandered, I could not help but wonder if capitalism was starting to spread on this small island like a wild fire.

‘Where will you be sitting?’ asked the young hotel worker. I wondered if, like on the continent, they charged here different prices for sitting inside and out, so I enquired about how much it would cost me to go outside: £3.20. I wished her well.

Inside the old church, not far away, I met Arthur Ash, an ex-preacher from Kenilworth. We had a chat inside the doorway of the church. Arthur told me as a young man, he had walked the pilgrims way in Scotland. Time passed on this lovely island, as it does on others, and after a reasonably priced coffee, in the old manse, near the church, I went to the water and picked up a white stone, and put it in my pocket, then made my way back to the ferry terminal.

Knowing that from the biography of St Columba: ‘*The kingdom of God stands not on the flow of eloquence, but in the flowering of faith,*’ I wondered if I should write something down about my trip to Iona and send it to you.

posted 11 June 2017

Extraordinary Girl

Coming back on the re-routed bus from town around half past three, I got off at my usual stop at the bottom of my street where I live. It was there I met an extraordinary girl.

She really was an extraordinary girl. There was no doubt about that. She may have only been 18 years old, but no one cannot deny she was extraordinary. She dressed in the latest casual fashion, not sporty but fashionable, with the latest trainers on. She was carrying it off in a way that only young people can do.

Once off the bus she turned right I turned left. Suddenly, I heard the driver shout out: “Oh No!”

Everyone who heard him - me included - turned to see the young lady, being catapulted over a car, on the other side of the road.

In flight, she was like a rag doll with no sense of will, no sense of time, no sense of place. Mercifully, she landed and got up on her feet. The driver raced out of his cabin, and I shouted to her to go to the pavement and sit down. There was blood on her head at the back, but not a lot.

After phoning for an ambulance as is the way nothing seemed normal. I went in search of a doctor. I had the feeling one lived nearby. The good neighbour said he lived on the corner. So I went along and rang the doorbell opposite the church only to find that the young doctor could not come. The young man, with a baby in his arms said apologetically: “I am in on my own.”

When I got back, I could see the bus driver was a good fellow, although shaken was over beside her. He too was on the phone. Presently, medics came

along with the police, about 15 minutes after being called.

I told you she was extraordinary: one week later, I saw this young lady walking down the same street in the pouring rain, at the same time cars were wizzing by her on both sides of the road. Now that is extraordinary.

Clouds Hill

It was a beautiful autumnal day. After visiting the grave in the town of Moreton, I made my way along the country roads, (in all about 3 miles) to my destination. You see, Clouds Hill is a place I have always remembered: for it was along this country road that my journey into the modern world began. Let me explain; dad only took me to one film. He had been a soldier in the Second World War, and had obviously heard about one of the best films ever made coming to our local cinema. In adulthood, he was not a filmgoer. And although ill at this point in his life, he must have wanted to take me to see it.

The film we saw at the end of the sixties was the acclaimed *Lawrence of Arabia*, by David Lean. He did mention something to me before going along

about Lawrence's exploits in the desert, and also that he was strange. As a boy, strange I found interesting: for life, or at least adult life, to me looked strange, as well as interesting.

It has been well documented that T. E. Lawrence, after a traumatic and wonderful life in the desert, returned home a few years later, a broken man. After some time in the area of Dorset, he bought Clouds Hill cottage. And it was from here that he wrote, he hoped the curtain would fall on his life soon.

At the local Toledo picture hall, at the end of the sixties, I remember watching the curtain rise, and a man on a motorbike tear along a country road to his death. This was the start of the adventure.

When I arrived at Clouds Hill around midday on Wednesday of this week, I looked along that very road. This is where, as a young boy, I was introduced to the modern world. Although, the film was in glorious technicolor, I knew I would have to search for the truth thereafter beyond the cinema

screen to understand it all. Places heard about, seen and visited would inspire me though.

In later years, I was to remember Lawrence, when I visited Cairo. Three times I went to al-Qāhirah. There, I engaged with friendly Arabs, and I somehow knew how to circumvent the strange ones.

From the film by David Lean, or from reading about T. E. Lawrence, who can forget the story of the Christian adventurer going back into the desert to save a man, who no one seemed to care about?

Posted 25 October 2018

Happy in Haworth

I arrived early in the town of Haworth, on Tuesday morning. It was a nice sunny day, even though it was cold. From the vicar's email, the night before, I knew that the Brontes were buried here in the church. Of course, I had heard about them before this but, to be honest, only had read a book by Charlotte Bronte a few weeks ago.

Jane Eyre for me opened up the past; I have been there before with other writers. Maybe you, like me, have been given insight into the past, and it has stayed with you too – not only that you like to be taken back there again. The past initially seems a friendly place to go to, out of reach, but it is when you realise that there are no privileged eras, and that

all the things that have happened before will happen again, you back away, and return happily into the present, but something remains somewhere within you, and whatever it is, it stays within your imagination.

In her novel *Jane Eyre*, there are things that seem faraway, yet when you come across them, they seem familiar to you, above all else, love and death are mysterious things. It is obvious Charlotte Bronte knew she could not understand life, at the time of living it. Having said that good manners are everywhere in the world of *Jane Eyre*. People know how to enter a room; they even know how to speak to each other in fine English. The maids and servants there keep out of sight: for ladies dressed up in their finery know how to take them down, as if it is their duty to do so.

As I walked to the church, the buildings on either side were not all that of a surprise to me. Some of them of course are in the novel. It was the moors and dales that got me. I could see they had been captured too, and put into a book along with

prominent folk who had once lived here in Haworth. As I came to the church, the background and the foreground of the novel, I had not long ago read, were now together as one.

I ask you, is it any wonder back in the time of Charlotte Bronte they had to make their own entertainment: writing stories, painting pictures and playing games. For I am sure if they had not done so, they would have all gone mad.

My favourite scene in *Jane Eyre* is not the lovely death scene of her friend, early on in the book. No, it happens late at night, when she is asked by the man she has fallen for to watch over Mr Mason. He has been attacked by a maid servant. There is a lot of blood on him. Of course, in the morning it will be hushed up, swept under the carpet, as we would say. It's a dark scene, yet there is a light shining through, and you sense that in the morning all will be well, and we will once again be able to walk out together and face the world.

And that is the thing you must remember about the Brontes, when reading them, they went towards the Light.

Posted on 26/9/18

Lawrence of Eastwood

In Eastwood, Nottinghamshire, September 1985, there was a Centenary for the writer D.H. Lawrence. With great expectations, I sent away for information about the festival.

At the beginning of the nineteen eighties, I was starting to get interested in literature. Like music, I could see that it could mirror life. D.H. Lawrence, I came across, after seeing a film about one of his novels. The first book I bought was the White Peacock, then I went on to read, Women in Love, Sons and Lovers, and the Rainbow.

Lawrence, the son of a miner, it was plain to see had been given the ability to portray his experiences

through characters in his books. Life around the time of the First World War, and what it was like, is recorded in the above novels for all to see. Not only that, human emotions not easy to understand he brought to the fore. I could see he had indeed been given insight few writers have had before or after him. Not only for this, I was attracted to him, for he was from the working class. All writers of modern fiction up until this point were from privileged backgrounds. The toffs were the ones who wrote books about life.

Lawrence could be very tender, yet shocking too. His understanding of the relationship between a man and his mother was very precise. As was his understanding between man and woman. At the time he was writing, Freud was on the go, but although much lies hidden in life, Lawrence strove to be authentic, and that is why his books are important today. Any young person wanting to understand the relationship between lad and lass, mother and father, and the tangle of emotions that come from close relationships between human-beings, can see them played out in his books.

The world that I lived in, I could see Lawrence's works around me. Everything was natural. The girl he met at church from the farm, Jessie Chambers. How the countryside thrilled him. The passion of love; the great and the good who not only want to control society, but lord it over you too, are all there. It was plain for me to see the only way out, to escape the tyranny of those who want to control the world, was to be yourself. Love of course is the great mystery of life, yet only those willing to give up the world will be able to experience it, of that there is no doubt.

In his book Lady Chatterly's Lover, he goes over the top. Everything is laid bare. However, the most revealing thing I got from it was in the apropos, in the 1928 Orioli edition, where he openly talks about sex, and how he tried to spiritualise it in his books. In doing so he was the precursor, I would say, to the swinging sixties and pop culture. One revealing thing he mentioned was 'sex hate'. You will still hear that today in society. His grandfather was a lay preacher, and his mother took him to church.

Lawrence knew the Bible, so taking another man's wife, he knew would have consequences.

The woman he ran away with was from Germany. This month, I visited Baden Baden: for the name where she came from has stayed with me. From the centre of this spa town, I went and sought out the place where D.H. Lawrence stayed at: Ebersteinburg. I have got to tell you, I nearly gave up: for I was on the wrong side of the road to catch the bus, and time seemed to be flying by. However, after I wandered over to the right side, I found the correct bus stop. And not far along the road I saw it coming and caught it.

Thankfully, once inside the school kids sitting in front of the bus reassured me that they would tell me when to get off at Ebersteinburg. It was two young German girls who got off there from the group. At the roundabout, as we walked, they laughed at me when I told them about the writer who stayed here in 1921. I could see the town although quiet was modern. What I was looking for, they could see was from another world. As we chatted, I wondered if

there would be anything left of the past here. ‘Are there any old people living here, or are they all young, like you?’

They laughed again. As we walked on towards the village centre, down from the stop at the roundabout, I could see further down the road there was a local store, and some people were sitting outside of it. Halfway down this road, I said cheerio to my two young friends: for they lived somewhere over to the left of the village.

I was starting to wonder if they were right that there was nothing here left from the past at all. Then I spotted an old building; this must be the one where Lawrence stayed; the old Gasthaus Krone. To confirm this, I spoke with the woman outside the store, not faraway. She was the owner, and confirmed that it would have indeed have been that place over there that any ancient traveller would have stayed at. It was shut at the moment. She had never heard of D.H. Lawrence, though.

I chatted for a time with the woman outside her little grocers shop. She was intrigued as to what had brought me here, so much so that she phoned her daughter and handed me the mobile phone to see if she knew anything about the writer, I was looking for. She then went inside to serve a customer.

It was a really friendly place. Lawrence, I was told by Dr Andrew Harrison,Director, Research Centre, School of English University of Nottingham, that D. H. Lawrence had liked this place: 'It was here that he completed *Aaron's Rod*. After failing to finish it in several previous attempts the words just came to him in Ebersteinburg. It was one of the places he always remembered fondly for his ability to work there – and also for the amazing surrounding countryside,' he had said.

After a chat with her daughter, I went into the shop to hand back her mother's mobile phone to her. When I was in the shop an attractive woman was collecting her messages, and I could see she was just about to pay for them. They were being prepared for her in a wicker basket. She told me that she had

once lived here, and still came here to the local store for her messages.

She too was interested in my search. So much so that the kind woman offered to drive me back to Baden Baden centre, after my search of the area. Yes, once again I could see that it was a friendly place here. The shopper typified this by not going to the supermarket in town, and giving this writer a lift, so that he could get on his way again. In the car she told me that she worked in the motor sector, as a scientist.

This week, I finally got round to going to Eastwood, Nottinghamshire, to visit the birth place of D.H. Lawrence. It was an early start, but I got there, around midday, even though the train from Manchester to Nottingham was delayed by about half an hour. The 1985 centenary guide sent to me, all those years ago, said that Walker Street, was where the writer stayed, and it was this view ‘that had the most profound influence on Lawrence throughout his life’.

So, it was there I headed to first. In a strange twist of fate outside the house, I met a contractor who was seeking access to Lawrence's old house, but he was not in luck, so he had to leave. Much I could see has been built here since the time of Lawrence, but I understood the area: for it was all coming back to me now from the books I had read. The local pub, The Moon and Stars, mentioned in his novel, is not far from his old house on Walker Street. Although, inside the pub you really have to look for the past, but I must tell you it is there.

Carolyn, who had emailed me from the D.H. Lawrence Birthplace Museum, Victoria Street, I knew was doing the daily tour of the house the author was born in at 1:15 pm. She laughed at me when I brought out my programme from 1985. I, of course, apologised that I was a bit late. It was a great tour: for she too brought back to life the past for the collection of visitors that day, who like me, had come to see the house where the writer was born.

When she finished, I dashed off to get back to Nottingham for the train back to Scotland Standing

at the bus stop waiting for the bus to take me to the station, I chatted with a retired couple. They told me they had lived here in the sixties. Of course, they knew about the writer, I had come to see. Before jumping on the bus, the woman looked at her husband for confirmation before she spoke: ‘When we lived here in the sixties, you know, he was not liked.’

I was not sure why they did not know or understand that: a prophet has no honour in his own country. Maybe, before leaving, I should have told them this.

posted 20 July 2018

Felpham then and now

A few weeks ago, I visited Felpham. I went to see William Blake's cottage there. Blake had lived for three years in Felpham. Before going, I read he was down there working on a project with a contractor. William Blake was of course from London, from Soho.

It was in Felpham, he wrote the poem Jerusalem. It was also recorded here that he ended up in court in Chichester. This was after an altercation with a soldier. I nearly ended up there too. It happened like this.

After visiting the cottage, I borrowed a bike from a friend and headed for Bosham. After turning off Smugglers Lane, up a country road, I turned right – it was the wrong way. Out came the angry farm dog. Of course, I corrected my course and managed to turn the bike round, without falling off onto the chips outside the farmhouse.

To be fair to the dog, he was barking and making a lot of noise, but he was not coming for my ankles. Just as I was heading back onto the country path again, out came the irate farmer. Thankfully, there was enough distance between us; he could not lunge at me. ‘Why are you not coming to speak with me,’ he said in his local accent.

“I am heading for Bosham,” I offered my excuse.

Mercifully, I was soon on the main path, and the dog at least seemed to be happy at this; he was trotting behind me. He had stopped barking and growling.

I could see that the farmer was there too. He had something like a weapon in his hand. When he saw me looking at him, he said in the same strange way as before: ‘Why are you not coming to speak with me?’

“Angry dog,” I said and peddled on.

It was a lovely day, and back down on Smugglers Lane, I stopped and spoke with an elderly man out with his (friendly) dog. He said he knew the farmer and his son. He sympathised with me, when I told him the story.

“Can you tell the farmer that I took the wrong path.”

“There has been a lot of break-ins here, a woman murdered,” he replied, and blamed it on foreigners.

Another kind local resident later that day told me that this farmer had threatened to shoot a man and his son for trespassing.

I can tell you, it was good to be on the right path again.

posted 21/4/2019

Play

Murder in the Reading Room

Characters

Angus (young man)

Tom (old head, canny nasal voice)

Frank (Big man, droll, high squeaky voice)

Harry (shop steward) always exact in every detail.

MURDER IN THE READING ROOM

(Inside the Reading Room three men are standing. Harry the union official comes in and shuts the door. Then he turns to face the assembled men)

Harry. (Grave voice) Now that the police have gone, I would like to call a meeting. I would like with your permission to carry out my own inquiry on behalf of the people who work here (dramatic pause).

(Murmur of voices)
Frank. Yes.

Angus. Of course.

Tom. Certainly

Harry. I am well aware that this inquiry will not bring Jamie back to life, but nevertheless I feel it is my duty as shop steward to find out who killed our colleague, and see to it that the evil person is brought to justice.

(Deadly silence)

Harry. (looking at Tom) Now, I am right in saying, Tom, that you were Jamie's partner here in the Reading Room most days of the week.

Tom. Yes, that's right, Harry. As you know we work in pairs, checking the print for errors. In fact Jamie and I had been together ever since the introduction of the new computerized system here in the new plant.

Harry. And you were working with him yesterday, before he was poisoned were you not?

Tom. (Folding his arms) Yes, that's right. (pause, then he asks) How can you be sure it was poison Harry?

Harry. (sigh) Well, that is what the police are saying at the moment Tom. They will no doubt be back. I spoke to inspector Strummer this morning, and he is quite convinced that it was poison. They say a glass was placed on top of his locker, and in it was deadly poison. A forensic expert came over this morning and took it away and they have now examined it. The police also have the good luck card that went along with the drink, apparently it said: 'Jamie have one on me'. (pause, looking at everyone) Now does anyone here know anything about this, and if so would they like to tell me before the police come back.

(Deadly silence)
(then collective voices answer)

Frank. Not me.

Angus. No way.

Tom. Absolutely not.

Tom (ironic laugh). Harry why did he drink it? I mean why did he not just spit it out? It must have tasted foul.

Harry. Well, I was hoping, Tom, that you could throw some light on it. To put it bluntly we all knew that Jamie liked a good drink, and I'll be the first to admit that when I have had a few drinks I can't tell the difference between vodka and water. I just drink the stuff.

Tom. If you are asking me was Jamie drunk yesterday. Well, I would have to say yes. He was pretty well gone by the end of the shift.

Harry. And at the end of the shift did you leave before him?

Tom. Yes, you see, Harry, it was my turn to slip away early. When it's quiet we only need one person to stay behind in the Reading Room in case anyone is looking for copy.

Harry. And when you got into the locker room, after you said goodnight to Jamie, did you see the good luck card on top of Jamie's locker?

Tom. No

Harry. What time do you think you were in the locker room at Tom?

Tom, (blowing out air) Oh, well it must have been I guess about twenty to five, maybe quarter to five.

Harry. And what time do you think Jamie would have left at?

Tom. I would imagine his usual time just a few minutes before five; however having said that it may have been later. You see if a journalist

comes in looking for copy that can keep you back. I have seen myself not leaving here till quarter past five some nights.

Harry. I checked with Mr McWhirter, the overseer, last night. He said that no one asked for copy after four o'clock. Everything was quiet. And he clearly remembers seeing Jamie inside the Reading Room at ten to five.

Tom. Is that right, I don't remember seeing old McWhirter last night, I thought he had gone away early, that's why I sneaked away early too.

Harry. Can I ask you, Tom, for you worked beside him. (pause, then looks far away) We all new Jamie could be difficult, but did he ever mention any problems to you?

Tom. He was always moaning about folk, (light laugh) but he never mentioned anything to me.

Harry. (turning to look at the person next to Tom.) Now, I think that I'm right in saying that you Angus, and you Frank, both finished at a quarter to four yesterday and were gone by the time Jamie was poisoned.

Frank. Yes, Harry, we were both in the pub next door by that time.

Angus. (Emphatic) That's right we were outside the building at that time.

Harry. (Playing devil's advocate) Would it be fair to say that either of you - working alone or together - could have come back into the building, you could have walked up the stairs to the second floor and into the locker room before five o'clock?

Frank. (angry) If you were playing devil's advocate you could say that, but Angus and I were in the Press Bar from four o'clock till five. Then we left together - didn't we, Angus?

Angus. (Definite tone) Yes, right on the dot. I remember checking my watch as we left, for I wanted to catch the 5.45 train.

Harry. But the police tell me that the staff in the press bar cannot remember either of you in the bar last night (looks around).

(Momentary silence)

Frank. Well, that comes as no surprise; the old bloke that they've got behind the bar in there is never sober.

(Angus laughs)

Harry. Staying on the subject of drink did any of you ever go with Jamie for a drink after work.

Angus. (In an easygoing tone) I think we all did at one time or another.

Tom. (factual) But you see Jamie was a big drinker and I noticed that when he got older he

couldn’t handle it. He would forget things. I remember lending him £20 once, and he never gave me it back. It didn’t bother me, but I wasn’t going to through that again, so the next time he asked me to go with him for a drink I just made up some excuse saying I was going out that night, and he never asked me again.

Harry (looking over his glasses). Did you know Tom that someone sent a poison pen letter to his wife.

Tom. No.

Harry. Yes, the letter arrived, yesterday, on the morning he was murdered.

Tom. What did it say?

Harry. It said that unless Jamie returned the money due to him he would be killed.

(Everyone looks at Tom)

Tom. What are you saying! Are you accusing me of killing Jamie for £20?

Harry. No, I'm not saying that Tom, but I thought I'd better mention it to you before I hand the letter over to the police.

Tom. (Still angry) Have you got the letter there? Let me see it!

(Harry slowly picks up his briefcase places it on a nearby table, opens it, and hands the letter to him)

Harry. Yes, here it is. You will see that it is written in black ink.

Tom. That's not my handwriting. (hands it back quickly)

Angus. (suspicious) When did his wife tell you about this letter Branch Secretary?

Harry. (nonchalantly) She phoned this morning, Angus. Of course, I went over right away to see her. Apparently, Jamie was there when she opened the letter. When she read it out loud Jamie just laughed and said to her that anyone who sends a letter like that, and who does not sign it, is not worth bothering about.

Angus. (quietly) What does it say?

Harry (Looking at the letter before putting it into the pocket of his Harris tweed jacket). It says, Angus, something about Jamie being dishonest and what will happen to him if the money is not paid back before the end of the month.

Angus (under pressure) What date was it yesterday when Jamie was killed?

Frank. The 30th of June.

Angus. So the killer was true to his word. (pause) How much money was involved?

Harry. That's the strange thing, Angus; the letter never mentions the amount.

(Pause then Harry speaks again)

Harry. You are the youngest here Angus.

Angus. Well, if thirty-five is young.

Harry. (ironic laugh) Did you have much in common with Jamie?

Angus. Actually, I used to get on quite well with him, and you know sometimes after work if I was still in the Press Bar when the late shift finished we would have a drink together.

Harry. Did you know his family?

Angus. (Looking serious) Yes, I know his son, Stephen. We sometimes see each other at the snooker club; in fact his son, if truth be told, is a bit of a rogue. Do you know that just last month

his son was playing at the next table to me? I was with my girlfriend - well she was then. I don't know why I did it, but I introduced her to Jamie's son, and would you believe it, guess who is going out with her now?

Harry. Were you angry at his son?

Angus. I was mad.

Harry. Did you tell the police about what happened?

Angus. (petulant) No, why should I, they never asked me.

Harry. Well, maybe they didn't, Angus, but I would imagine that Jamie's son will mention it to the police.

Angus. Hey just wait a minute! I never killed Jamie's son because he stole my girlfriend.

Harry. I never said you did, but you can see now why it is important for the Branch Secretary of your union to get involved, because we all know that the police will interview you again, and I don't want any undue pressure being put on any of my members, (looking at everyone) so let's all just calm down and try to help each other through this difficult situation. (pause, then Harry speaks to Frank) Now Frank I have known you since printing college days and although we haven't seen much of each other over the past five years one hears things. (pause) I heard that you and Jamie had a fall out many years ago, and I know that you used to be quite close.

(Another pause inviting Frank to speak)

Frank. I that's right Harry (sigh) it was stupid thing right enough. It happened just after we had left the old building. Like you say Jamie and I were the best of buddies then. We used to go on holiday together, and we used to visit each others' homes. To cut a long story short I

suggested to him that he should apply for a desk job and become one of the management team here. The desk jobs were fast becoming available because of the advent of the new technology. I was only joking of course. At first he didn't take me seriously, then one day he put his name down. Well, as everyone knows, Jamie never got the job, and he took it bad when the youngest man in the Reading Room got it. In fact, just last week I was in the locker room and Jamie came in. How's it going? I said to him, and you know he nearly took a swing at me. It was only Mike Woodcock knocking on the door looking for lottery money that saved the day. (Ironic laugh)

Harry. Did the police ask you about your relationship with Jamie?

Frank. Yes, they did, and I just told them that we had drifted apart many years ago.

Harry. Did you not think it was important, Frank, to clear yourself by telling them about the incident in the locker room.

Frank. No, I didn't (angry) and if you want to accuse me of the murder of Jamie the Copy Reader, then just you go right ahead, and I will sue you.

Harry. Frank I'm not accusing you. (exhaustive pause) It seems so far I have accused everyone. All I'm trying to do is ask some questions so that I can make a report to the Executive Committee on the death of Jamie the Copy Reader. (pause) Now, at this point I would like to make you aware that when I arrived here in the newspaper office this morning I was handed, by the Chief Security Officer, the key to Jamie's locker. I went through some of Jamie's belongings and found a very interesting manuscript. (Harry opens his briefcase again and ruffles some papers)

Tom. I didn't know Jamie was writing a book.

Frank. Oh, he was always reading books Tom, but like you I can never remember him writing anything.

Harry. (Ruffling the papers again) Well, here it is. Obviously, I haven't had the time to go through it yet with a fine tooth comb. However, as far as I can make out it is a collection of Jamie's thoughts stretching way back to when he worked in the old plant. He writes about a world before the introduction of computer terminals, cordless phones, and all that sort of stuff - a golden era he calls it.

Tom. I they were the days right enough.

Frank. I remember them well.

Harry. Now gentlemen with your permission I would like to read to you some extracts from this manuscript. However, I must warn you that at the very end of the manuscript there is a chapter called Murder in the Reading Room.

Tom. What's that!

Frank. Is this some kind of joke?

Harry. It's certainly no joke. Now, would anyone like to say anything before I read some extracts from the manuscript.

(silence)

Angus. (Quite calm) I have no objections.

Tom. It seems a strange business to me, but please carry on Branch Secretary.

Harry. (looking at him) Frank?

Frank. By all means carry on.

Harry. Right here we go: Chapter One: Days of the week:

Monday. Terrible day, but I got through it somehow. Tuesday. Felt much better. Someone that I hardly knew mentioned to me that Bill Taylor's funeral is tomorrow. I never knew he died. Bill was a nice bloke. You think someone would have mentioned it to me before this. I could have arranged to go to the funeral. Wednesday. Mid week football, they say it's a chance to chat about how your team is doing. Not being all that interested in football I don't say very much. The modern sports fan today is like a philosopher. Sometimes he's confident, other times he is humble. However, I think it is funny when people become passionate, for you can be sure abuse is just around the corner. Thursday. Pay-day wandered down to the building society. The pretty teller saw me coming, and as usual after I had handed over my pay in book she said to me in a charming voice, "is it that time again". Went for a pint, put a bet on. Then went back to work. Friday. Went to the Station Bar with Ronnie Lawson as usual. Ronnie was not feeling well. Ronnie did not say very much. Just made the train on time.

Ronnie read his paper all the way to Clarkston, and never said a word to me.

Right I will stop you there and get a feel from you lads, but before I do, I would like to say something about the manuscript. As I have already indicated to you the last chapter in it is called Murder in the Reading Room, and I can tell you that Jamie names the killer in the play and it is one of you.

Tom. What's that!

Angus. What do you mean!

Frank. How can that be?

Angus. No-one can write about his own murder can he?

Harry. I never said he did Angus. He was obviously using the characters around him as subject matter for his first novel.

Frank. It’s unbelievable.

(Deathly silence as everyone takes in the news that the murderer is named in the manuscript)

Frank. Gee whiz well as far as the first chapter goes it is pretty boring, but who knows with the killer being named at the end of the book it may well indeed turn out to be a blockbuster.

Harry. Right okay I’ll push on with Chapter Two. This chapter is called: Working Class Hero, and as far as I can see it is set in the time of the industrial transformation at the end of the 1970’s. Socialism is just about to go out of fashion, and right wing politics are coming to the fore.

In this extreme atmosphere between left and right, something made me grab the wheel of power; however, it was short lived: for I was beaten to the desk job by a younger man with a younger outlook. And as I wandered back to the shop floor with tears in my eyes something

inside me kept on saying to me, you would have been good for them Jamie boy. But then again if I think about it what have I done: I have tried to join that exclusive club called the bosses - people who wear suits and ties and who meet in secret to forward the capitalist cause. I met them and they rejected me - funny thing is I can still see myself standing in front of the workers saying to them, right lads you can all leave your machines now and go home. Yes, they would have all benefited from Jamie the boss; he would have been a good boss to them. He would have been good for them all right.

Harry. Well, we all know what he is on about here.

Tom. Yes, that's right Harry, and he never spoke to Frank again because of it, but isn't it strange you can never tell what people are thinking and what they are really like. I mean obviously from that account Jamie saw himself as some sort of working class hero although in real life he didn't come across that way.

Frank. He admits quite clearly there that he wanted to be a boss, and he may well have been a good boss for all we know. I tell you it wouldn't be hard to better some of those idiots we've got running the place at the moment; I mean most of them are just yes men.

Angus. I you are right there Frank, you just have to look at the way they've changed things in the last few years. Anything that moves to the right is good, and anything that moves to the left is out.

(Laughter)

Franks (interrupts) And I tell you another thing there is no soul left in the workers now, it has been sucked out of them. They have been brainwashed by the media and the people who run it. Now the bosses every year give themselves a big pay rise and the workers are left with the crumbs.

Harry. That's interesting Frank, I haven't heard you speak like that before. Can I ask you what is your definition of a worker today - because in this fast moving high tech world it is sometimes difficult to convince the workers, that I meet, that they are different from the bosses.

Frank. The definition of a worker today, in my view Harry, is someone who is lucky enough to work for a living.

(Laughter)

Harry. Yes, you're right there.

Frank (continues) When you are a worker you can say you are contributing to the welfare of the country.

Angus. I your right there Frank, there's too many money men out there who contribute nothing to society.

Tom. I don't think we should read anymore of this stuff, I mean it's not fair on Jamie - I know there is something about a murder in the last chapter, but I think we should just leave it well alone. We should be dealing with facts not fiction.

Angus. Ach no, it's good to hear the thoughts of someone you once worked with. Even though I fell out with his son, it doesn't stop me wanting to listen to what's he's got to say.

Frank. I agree with that. As you all know Jamie and I had fallen out too, but I think we should hear what's written - after all we worked together for a long time.
Harry. (sardonic) Well, if I'm not losing my senses it is a majority for going on. Now the next chapter is called Sad Socialism and we are still somewhere in the late 1970s with the sacking of Tim Stevenson's son

Frank. Oh, I remember that.

Tom. I, they were out to get him all right.

Harry. Looking at the manuscript I can see that Jamie knew Tim Stevenson's son was a member of the No Turning Back group who eventually called themselves Bannockburn, and who advocated independence for the country.

Frank. Oh, those head cases; I tell you they wrecked the belief in the national dream.

Angus. (Innocently) Who were they?

Frank. (turning to him) That's right you were too young to remember Angus. You see in the 1970's a lot of people, and I admit I was one of them, formed the opinion that it would be better if Scotland took control of its own affairs.

Harry. I will stop you there Frank, I'd rather not get into politics if you don't mind - god knows I talk about it every day of the week in one way or another.

Frank: Yes, I accept that Harry, but it was relevant to what we were saying was it not.

Harry. Oh, sure Frank, but let us get back to the episode in question, the sacking of Tim Stevenson's son. Tim Stevenson's son was sacked because he led a campaign to try to get Hugh Lewis reinstated. Tim was the union rep. The union, as you know, fought the case that was put up against Hugh Lewis. Hugh, who if I remember correctly, had been off on the sick for 6 months with vertigo, and as we all know we lost the case at the industrial tribunal. (pause) I must say it didn't really help when Hugh Lewis turned up half cut in front of the committee.

(Laughter)

Harry. (Heavy sigh, then continues) The decision of the committee as I said went against us, but Tim Stevenson's son kept up the campaign to try and get Hugh Lewis reinstated. In fact, it got to the stage that when any of the

management appeared in the Reading Room, Tim Stevenson's son, and a few others, would shout at them: "Sackers of Sick Men!" Well, the management did not stand for that, and it wasn't long till I was called in. I was told that the dispute regarding Hugh Lewis was over and if any of the Reading Room staff continued to chant "Sackers of Sick Men!" at the management they to would be dismissed instantly. Tim Stevenson's son as we all know was a hot head. After I gave him a warning he called a meeting of the Reading Room members and proposed a strike. Thankfully the Reading Room staff voted against strike action and went back to work, that is everyone except Tim Stevenson's son who went and got a tin of black paint from the maintenance section and painted the personnel manger's office with the slogan: "Sackers of Sick Men".

(laughter)

Tom. I they were different days all right

Frank. (reflective) It was a terrible business, I mean they were always out to get Tim Stevenson's son.

Tom. Well, he gave him every chance didn't he?

Frank. Maybe so, but it still doesn't get away from the fact that the management sacked a man who was on the sick and had a sick line.

Tom. The times were changing Frank.

Angus. Listen I wasn't in the company at this time, but what were Jamie's views, I mean he was in the Reading Room at this time wasn't he?

Harry. Yes, that's right Angus, Jamie was present at the time of the sacking, in fact if I remember rightly I think he had just moved to the Reading Room from the Stereo department.

Tom. Yes, that's right Harry, he had just moved then.

Harry. I will read another bit of this manuscript and it will give you some idea of what was going on at this time.

No-one knows why the workers behave the way they do. Sometimes when a meeting is called they shout for justice, other times they just sit there as quiet as anything. Anyway after the meeting regarding Hugh Lewis, Tim Stevenson's son came up to me in the toilet. His face was full of aggression. He said, listen Jamie boy, they've no right, these Sackers of Sick Men, to do this. They are always targeting the weak so that they can show themselves to be strong. And I will tell you another thing it won't be long till they come knocking on your door Jamie boy - so let's bring the rotten system down, and go on a wild cat strike. I said to him don't be daft. Then I told him that the decision by the members of the Reading Room not to go on strike was a correct decision: for when Hugh Lewis failed to turn up

for his medical it was all over and done with. He never bothered to get in touch with anyone. He owed people money and this was why he was afraid to come to work. When I stared at him Tim Stevenson's son replied: Well, if that was the case the committee should have investigated it and sent someone along to speak to Hugh Lewis, informing him that if he did not turn up for his medical he would be sacked. The management look after themselves don't you forget that Jamie boy, replied Hugh Lewis. I could not agree with him, for as far as I was concerned Tim Stevenson's son was hell bent on being a martyr. And you know as we walked back together to our desks - it suddenly hit me how the management love a stubborn mule who does not care about anyone else. The stubborn mule you see will distract attention away from the things that the management want to hide like large company profits and unfair working practices.

Harry. Right, now would anybody like to comment about what I have just read?

Tom. (Quick to speak) Well, it's all true what you have read Harry, but even now I still find the whole thing a bit strange.

Harry. You can see his point though, can't you?

Tom. Oh, sure.

Angus. Was that what it was like in the old plant?

Harry. It certainly was Angus. I didn't work beside Jamie in the old plant, but I must say I have got a good deal of sympathy with what he is saying, you see there were a lot of union members at that time who thought they were doing the movement a lot of good by fighting the management when really they were doing the opposite.

Angus. They say that even though there were more disputes around this time, the atmosphere in the work place was better.

Harry. (sighing) There is a lot in that, you know. I think there something in us humans that likes to argue, it seems to set us free.

Frank. (Carefree tone) I you are right there Harry, and I will tell you this it's the quiet chap in the corner of a meeting that you have to look out for. By the way, I see that we are not even halfway through the manuscript; I hope you are not going to read it all.

Harry. No, no, I'm just reading extracts from it, in the hope that something might jog your memory.

Tom. I wonder if some will eventually publish it.

Harry. I doubt it. There are no publishers left in Glasgow since the computerized revolution. And nowadays I think to attract the publishers south of the border you have to be interested in sexual padding.

(laughter.)

Angus. Sexual padding is all the rage these days it seems to sell well. In fact I have just bought a book by a woman called Money Euordice and I tell you the first five chapters are all about how she met this bloke in the Hague, and how he tried to get her to join a new cult called The Erotic Euro Robots.

Harry. Don’t stop there Angus tell us about the next five chapters

Tom. Yes, go on Angus.

Angus. (Embarrassed.) Ah, I got so fed up with it, I threw it away.

Frank. Oh, Angus.

Tom. You youngsters these days you don’t know what life is all about. You wander around with

those stereo earphones in all day dreaming of God knows what.

(laughter)

Harry: Right getting back to the manuscript, I must say what hits me is that I don't remember Tim Stevenson's son being in anyway involved with Jamie, do you?

Frank. That's right Tim was never in our section in the old plant, and to the best of my knowledge Jamie didn't have much to do with him either.

Angus. So when Jamie voted at that meeting regarding Hugh Lewis he may not have known much about him.

Harry. That's right Angus, just like at the moment if something happens in another section in the newspaper office you may not know the chap, or the issue involved in the dispute, but if someone in your section moves a strike vote,

then you must vote on whether you are willing to take action or not.

Angus. We haven't had a sacking in the new plant yet have we?

Harry. No thank goodness Angus; however no doubt someone will step out of line and we will have to go through it all again. (pause then he looks down at the manuscript).

Harry. Now getting back to the manuscript (leafing through the pages) Where were we - ah here we are here; Jamie goes on to talk about the moneylenders in the Reading Room in the old plant

Tom. (surprised) What's that?

Harry. Yes, Jamie writes about the system that once operated in the old plant, and he also mentions the names of the moneylenders, (nonchalantly) that's you, Tom, and Bill Jones.

Tom. (slyly) Ach that was in the old days, when everyone used to borrow money, you must remember that Harry.

Harry. Oh, I remember it all right, and I remember the trouble it caused too.

Frank. (reminiscing and changing the subject) In the old plant in the Reading Room, I remember we used to read the death notices out in nursery rhyme fashion to cheer ourselves up.

Angus. (innocently) What did you do that for?

Frank. Oh, it can get awfully depressing reading the BMD's all day Angus.

Tom. However, what does Jamie's say about me.

Harry. Jamie says that sometimes you would ask him to bank the holiday money for him, and keep some sort of record for the men.

Tom. Oh, that's right; I forgot about that- it was a long time ago. You see Bill and I were never very good at banking, or keeping records, so we would ask Jamie to do it for us.

Harry. Jamie's mentions that he banked the wrong amount once, and after that he told you to do it yourself.

Tom. (ironic laugh) That's right Jamie backed the coupon money instead of the holiday fund, and to top it all Bill and I were both on holiday and someone thought they had got the coupon up and the money wasn't even on.

Harry. I think I am right in saying that over here in the new plant no-one gets involved in saving money or lending it.

Tom. Oh, there's no need for it, Branch Secretary, everyone is well off these days.

(Laughing)

Angus. That's not true Tom there is always a need for a tenner, or a fiver, at the beginning of the week. Ted MacDougal is man every one goes to now.

Harry. (enlightened) Is that right Angus.

Frank. Ted is too generous for his own good; I mean he doesn't even charge them interest on it.

Angus. And sometimes he doesn't even get it back.

Harry. Right let's move on to the next bit where it mentions something about - oh, where is it - I was sure it was here somewhere. (leafing through the manuscript)

Harry. Yes, here it is, it says something about Jamie being a Plymouth Brethren.

Angus. (laughing) What's a Plymouth Brethren?

Frank. You may well ask.

Harry. It doesn’t say Angus. (pause) Frank you knew Jamie when he first joined the company.

Frank. I remember something about that, but as far as I know Harry not long after he had settled into his new house, he joined the local church and eventually became an elder. He kept things pretty close to his chest, though.

Tom. That’s right Frank, in fact I know more about him now after listening to what he has written than I did before.

Harry. Right, well I see it’s getting near to the morning coffee break, so we will adjourn. Now because of the importance of the situation I will ask you lads to come back in half an hour, on the dot please.

Frank. Yes, that’s fine.

Tom. Right.

Harry. (As they adjourn Branch Secretary Harry Shepherd relaxes) I think I'll send for some coffee from the canteen.

Angus. I'm going to the canteen Branch Secretary; I'll ask then to send it down to you.

Harry Could you Angus that would be very kind of you.

(On his way out Tom also speaks to Harry)

Tom. This is a funny business, Harry, someone poisoning Jamie and then a manuscript turning up, and at the end of it there is a chapter called Murder in the Reading Room. (sigh) It is hard to take it all in.

Harry. (nodding) It certainly is Tom.

Tom. (shaking his head) Well, I'm going for a quick pint down at the Press Bar. I need one after listening to all that.

Harry. Right Tom. (Then turning to the man next to him) Are you not going for a break Frank?

Frank. No, I usually just stay here and have a smoke and read the morning paper. Do you want one Harry? (handing him a cigarette?)

Harry. No thanks Frank, I gave them up years ago - 40 a day man I was, you know.

Frank. (Stretching) Is that right Harry, I knew you used to smoke, but I didn't think you were a heavy smoker.

Harry. (laughing) I wonder why is it that all of the good things in life are bad for you.

Frank. You are right there, Harry. (pause as everyone leaves) I don't want to say anything

till the others come back, but what's going on. I mean a poison pen letter, a greeting card written by a strange hand, and a man poisoned to death in the Reading Room. Then a manuscript turns up written by the man who has just been murdered - it's just like something out of a movie. And who knows this manuscript may well yet turnout to be a great story and Jamie boy a great novelist.

Harry. It's kind of you to say that Frank especially since you two had fallen out.

Frank. Listen between you and me, Harry, do you think the killer is in the Reading Room.

Harry. I am saying nothing. My job is to find out the facts. If the killer is here among us in the Reading Room I'm confident he will reveal himself. It is important that he is caught, Frank, for in my opinion if a man kills once, he will kill again. (the two men look into each other's eyes, a long pause) It's best not to say anymore till the lads come back from their break.

Frank. (Comically) Yea.

(Harry sees the morning paper beside Frank's desk)

Harry. (Making conversation) What's in the morning paper then Frank?

Frank. Oh, this is just the local paper. I buy it every week. They sometimes have some good stories about what is going on in and around the local area. Look here's one here. (Frank shows Harry the page, then he reads it out) Video nasty makes man throw video recorder through TV shop rental window. Shoppers at Eastwood Toll were yesterday shocked when a middle-aged man threw an expensive video recorder threw a well-known TV video rental company window.

(Laughing)

A middle-aged man from the local area, well known for is political views, as well as unusual

social habits, was later arrested near his home and taken to Giffnock police station. After the incident a spokesman for the TV video rental company said that as far as he was concerned it was all top quality pornography that he sold and reminded our reporter that all his stock had a government certificate.

Harry. It's a job right enough, these days; you don't know what you are watching. Anyway what are they saying on the sports page?

(Franks turns to the back page)

Frank. (As if talking to himself.) Oh the big game is on TV tonight, excellent.

Harry. Who do you think will win Frank?

Frank. It's not an easy one to forecast; united are no mugs, you know (pause). I think they will take a bit of beating.

(Knock at the door, then the tea lady enters)

Tea lady. (smiling) Coffee for the Branch Secretary.

Harry. (hurrying to meet her) Right here you are luv. I'll get it.

(Harry takes the tray from her, exit tea lady)

Harry. Turning to Frank. Do you want a cup of coffee Frank?

Frank. Might as well, it's free isn't it.

(After coffee and biscuits Tom and Angus arrive back)

Harry. (Enthusiastic) Ah, there is Tom and Angus, now we can get back to the inquiry about who poisoned Jamie the Reading Room man.

(Everyone resumes the same position as before. However, before the meeting is opened again some light chit chat takes place)

Frank. Did you get your bet on Angus?

Angus. I did that Frank, but I'm not sure if I should tell you the name of the horse.

Frank. (Enjoying the conversation) Oh, come on Angus. I'm hardly likely to stick on a huge bet on the race now and bring the price down.

Angus. You are not going to believe this. You know how my uncle works in the betting shop across the road. Well, this morning he told me about this hot tip. Everyone is on it.

Frank. Straight from the horses mouth no doubt

Tom. More like straight from the horse's ass.

(Laughter)

Frank. Go on then what is it called?

Angus. (Waving the betting slip) Shylock Poison, a rank outsider at 12-1

Harry (sober) Yes. (then turning to Frank) Did you see where I put the manuscript?

Frank. You put it back in your briefcase, Harry.

(Pause as Harry opens his briefcase however, as he does he continues to speak to Angus)

Harry. Anyway how is your life going young Angus, no doubt you are chasing the young ladies around the town.

Angus. I don't know about that, Branch Secretary; I'm seeing a nice girl at the moment. She is studying philosophy.

Harry. Oh, one of those clever chicks, eh. (takes manuscript out and clicks his briefcase shut)

Angus. I, she is a clever one all right. Last night she was telling me about this bloke called Heidegger. He says that we humans should start with the world in us and not something we should infer. She completely lost me.

Frank. Me too.

Angus. Anyway do you know what she calls me?

Harry. No, what?

Angus. Dasein

Tom. What's a Dasein when it's at home?

Angus. It's a being being she says.

Harry. And what is a being being when it is at home.

Angus. Someone who just reacts, I guess.

Frank. Well, we are all much the wiser now, Angus, I'm sure.

Tom. (changing the subject) The Press Bar was buzzing this morning. You can imagine everyone was talking about the murder of Jamie.

Harry. (Official voice) Right, I would like to open the inquiry again on behalf of the Branch. Can I ask you Tom to go back to the topic of the moneylenders in the old plant?

Tom. Well, there's not much more I can say, Harry, it was such a long time ago.

Angus. (interrupting) When I was in the bookies it suddenly hit me that the killer must be one of us - I mean we are the only ones who have keys for the locker room.

Tom, Ach any fool can get into our locker room if they want to.

Harry. Well, I don't know so much about that Tom. There was no sign of forced entry; however I willing to admit that the killer could have acquired a duplicate key.

Frank. How many keys are there for the locker room Harry?

Harry. As far as I know there are five in total, you three have got one, Jamie had one, and the security manager has got an extra one. The chief of security assures me that no one has ever asked him for the key to the Reading Room locker room since the locks were changed.

Tom. What's puzzling me is that if Jamie knew there was a killer in the Reading Room why did he drink from the whisky glass on top of the locker?

Harry. Eh! Are you talking as regards fact or as regards fiction? (checking the manuscript) Now where did I put that marker, ah here it is here. This section is all about secret societies and

groups of clever men who portray the cloth cap image, but who are really capitalists. I will read you a bit, and I am sure you will soon get the picture.

Shift starts and in come the men of the modern computer age. It may well be a new era, but some things never change. The masons still shake hands in the morning. The bosses still walk about here and there, and lord it over the workers. The workers dream of freedom, but live far from reality. You see modern man is a strange creature. He has never fought a war. Modern man has been given every thing for nothing. He hides himself from himself. He is like a ghost. He acts smart, and utters no threat. At all times he accepts what the management say. He is like a robot. When he goes home at night he switches on his TV. He does not want to think about his life. All he wants is overtime so that he can buy a new car, a new house, a new dream. He cares for no one. He will never strike on a principle, for the good of the state or the

dignity of labour. He is happy that the private sector runs everything now.

Frank. (breaking in) Listen, I know there are people who affiliate themselves to political parties and other weird and wonderful affiliations, but the strange thing is Jamie was never interested in politics.

Harry. Times change Frank.

Frank. Maybe so, but…

Angus. Like everyone else he chatted about these kinds of things, Frank, but I must agree with you he never gave the impression to me that he was interested in politics.

Tom. As you know I worked with him everyday on the same shift, but I can't remember him ever saying anything to anyone about politics.

Angus. (thinking it important) The only thing I can add is that he wore a red tie.

Tom. Oh, that doesn't mean a thing Angus, I have got a blue one on, but I'm not a Tory.

(Agreement in light laughter)

Harry. Okay lads, I would now like to push on. (pause as he looks at the next part of the manuscript) You know I think Jamie was very perceptive to the changes going on around him - especially at the time of the introduction of new technology. This chapter here is all about new technology, and unemployment. I will read on a little bit, and I'm sure you will understand.

Angus. (unsure) Oh, right

Harry. *Modern man wants overtime. He wants to buy cars, and property. He does not care for the unemployed man or woman. Modern man belongs to no political party. Modern man will never strike on a principle. In fact modern man would rather see the private sector run everything. Beer and cigarettes have been*

replaced by stocks and shares. Secret plans are in place. Redundancy will soon be a golden word, just you wait and see. The workers, the fools, will soon be chatting about how much they will be getting. They will leave no legacy for their children. (silence then Harry looks up) Well, there you go some passionate stuff there from Jamie.

Angus. Does he mean that new technology was brought into the workplace for only the good of the capitalist system?

Harry. I think that's right Angus. There are other ways to trim industry in natural wastage and so on; but obviously Jamie felt that the introduction of new technology was a chance for the bosses to make more profits. Of course, if you look at the unemployment figures you will see a major increase at the time when new technology was brought into this country.

Frank. By the way Harry, I forgot to ask you earlier on. How did Jamie's wife seem when you spoke to her?

Harry. Surprisingly all right, Frank, for a woman who has just had her husband murdered.

Frank. (solemnly) Yea.

(others murmur)

Harry. Right let's get back to the manuscript, this time Jamie talks about Saturday afternoons in the old plant where there was an extended lunch break for everyone, because of the late sports edition. (sigh) This Saturday Jamie and Jim Meyer visit a store in Buchanan Street, and when they are there they see a hold up. I will read this paragraph and see what you make of it. The chapter is called Happy days in the old plant.

Well, here we go again and it's Saturday, and all the football fans are in the city wearing their

club colours and chanting their party songs, and in between every bus stop and boutique people are going about their business with smiles on their faces. It is as if they are saying look it's our day off. Everyone seems to be out on the streets today. And would you believe it when Bill and I visited the big department store, the perfume counter was held up by three masked men. The big blonde behind the counter, who really should have been in the movies, started screaming like a banshee as the men emptied her till. Jimmy didn't feel being like a hero, and he whispered to me let's get out of here Jamie boy, and you know if it wasn't for the sawn-off shot gun I might have disagreed with him and helped the screaming blonde; however as quick as a flash it was all over and the robbers were flying past us with their loot in their hands. The strange thing is that, you know, even though the robbers wore balaclavas and dark glasses - I thought I recognized one of them.

Frank. Oh, yea I remember the ringleader was never caught and the others received a heavier sentence for protecting him.

Angus. Do you think Jamie knew the ringleader and was about to reveal his name and this was why he was poisoned?

Harry. I am afraid we will never know Angus.

Tom. Mind you it was such along time ago; they may all be dead by now.

Harry. Did Jamie ever come across the local fence in the old plant Tom?

Tom. Everyone knew them Harry and who they were, I mean you couldn't go into a pub without coming across them. I remember a story about some bloke who wanted a sofa from the big department store just round the corner. You know what he did, he took the fence along to the store pointed it out to them, and they delivered it to his house the next day.

Angus. (surprised) Is that right Tom?

Tom. Ah, that's what happened in these days.

Harry. We are much better off now here in the new plant with the new technology.

Frank. Oh give me the old days any day, when a newspaper was made from ink and type. The characters were unbelievable.

Angus. I've heard, you know, that computer terminals are full of radiation.

Tom. (angry) Oh, Angus, you're talking through a hole in your head.

Angus. No, I tell you it's true. I heard a story that when they were developing the system in America two women sitting opposite each other contracted cancer in opposite eyes.

Harry (quick to answer) I was the Branch Secretary at that time and it was me who took the union team over to America. I never heard anything like that.

Frank. Was there not some sort of trouble about who got going on that trip to America, Harry?

Harry. Oh, there is always trouble about that sort of thing Frank.

Frank. And didn't Jamie put his name down to go?

Harry. (remembering) Yes, that's right, Jamie forwarded his name, but the Branch Committee took the view that they wanted the young men to see the system in America, so that they would benefit from it.

Tom. That's right and the bloke they chose from the reading section left the company as soon as they came back from America; he opened up a hamburger stall on the south side of the city.

(laughter)

Frank. That's America for you.

Harry. (trying to justify it) Well, as you know it's difficult to see these things happening at the time. I mean no one could have imagined a chap leaving such a well-paid job to go into the service industry.

Frank. No, I know what you mean. I wonder what he's doing now.

Tom. (honesty) Someone told me last week, Harry that he has opened a chip shop and is making a bomb.

Harry. Right chaps let's get back to the inquiry. We are approaching the halfway mark of the story, and it is at this point that Jamie talks about dreams and recollections from his childhood. Jamie you see was the son of a merchant seaman, his father by all accounts

knew the world like the back of his hand. When he came home from sea the boys - that's Jamie and his brother Joe - would run to meet him shouting where has the ship been docked captain, and their father would always reply. (Looking down and the manuscript) Oh, it's a government secret that one, but if you are good I will tell you just before you go to sleep tonight all about my travels on the seven seas.

Harry (breaks off) This bit is quite interesting. I will read it to you.

So dad came back from the unbelievable world of choppy seas and foreign lands, and as he sat on my bed he would open his hands and show me the coins that he had collected from faraway places like Gibraltar and North Africa. Where did you get these coins from? I would ask, and he would reply: These coins here were found by a diver who was looking for sunken treasure. You see I was in this bar in Cape Town this night when a man came up to me and said: See these coins here they are worth a fortune. I knew

he smoked, but I didn't have any cigarettes to give him. So I gave him some shag, and I brought them half way around the world just for you, my son. Thereafter every night I would sleep with the foreign coins under my pillow, and in my imagination I would dream that I was travelling to faraway lands. I would imagine old women dressed in colourful costumes. They would approach me and say. And where are you from my little one. And I would reply, Oh I am from Scotland, the land of tartan and rain. Then I would speak to them again asking them questions about food supplies and housing conditions just like a prince does. The dreams would eventually fade away just like the day disappears into the night. However, when my dad was about to go away again, I would creep downstairs in the morning and watch him swing his kitbag over his shoulder. He always knew I was there, and just before leaving he would turn round and wink at me; then he would be gone again.

Well, that's the chapter called Dreams and Recollections (looking up from the pages that he has just read) Obviously no one knew Jamie when he was a child, but what did you make of it?

Tom. (Serious voice) Couldn't say, Branch Secretary, it maybe the case that he substituted fiction for fact and got carried away with himself.

Harry. Yes, I know what you mean Tom

Angus. (Dreamily) I remember a girl from years ago telling me that she was in such a hurry one morning that she drove to her work in her pyjamas, and I still can't make up my mind if that story was fiction or fact.

Tom (annoyed) I you certainly know some queer types Angus,

(Laughter from the others)

Tom. The point that I was trying to make was that when a writer needs a good script, and when he hasn't got one, he has got to make one up. At the end of the day no one knows if the story is true or false.

Harry. Right let's keep going, I would now like to push on to the next section which is all about football.

When I was young junior football was the highlight of the week for me. I went to all the games, home and away. One time I remember we got to the final of the Scottish Cup, and we were two nil up at half-time. I thought it a good idea if I phoned mum to tell her the score, she was sort of interested in the team you see. So I got to this garage not far from the pitch and I asked the young lad if I could use the phone. The oil clad young man looked at me for a minute with tired eyes, then he said yes okay. And just as I was about to go inside he shouted to me does she live in this country? Yes, I replied quickly. Well, inside the office I found

the phone in the middle of a table. There seemed to be thousands of things lying around here and there, bits and bobs of this and that. Well, after telling mum we were up two nil, I put the phone down. I was feeling quite good, you know, when all of a sudden an Alsatian awoke from under the table and stared at me. Suddenly with foaming mouth he came towards me. At once I jumped on top of the table and danced around it like a Cossack kicking everything here and there. However, lucky for me the young oil clad man came in and grabbed the dog shouting: Down Satan, down boy!
Funny name for a dog, I thought, as I ran back to the park to watch the football match. When I arrived there the man at the turnstile smiled at me, then told me: Your team's in trouble, son, it's two each now.

(pause)

Frank. Yes, that's right when Jamie and I were friends we would meet sometimes on a Saturday afternoon and go to one of the junior games.

Funny enough I remember one time Jamie invited me into his Junior club bar after the game for a drink, and I won the raffle that night; I think it was £200.

Harry. By the way Frank did any other staff come into the Reading Room and talk to Jamie about football, or anything else for that matter.

Frank. I never saw anyone, Harry, but Tom would know he was his reading partner.

Tom. No, he didn't have many friends from the other departments. (change of tone) Listen getting back to the manuscript, Branch Secretary, tell me how seriously you are taking all of this. I mean you said at the end of the manuscript Jamie writes about a murder in the Reading Room, but…

Harry. It's difficult to explain Tom. You see, I am hoping that certain things from the manuscript will jog the memory and throw up a clue as to who killed Jamie the Copy Reader.

(pause, and when no one speaks he continues) Now the next chapter is called Flying High. We are now high in the sky with Jamie and his family, destination Tenerife…

The thing I love most about travel is the pampering you get; I mean they really do make you feel as if you are royalty when you fly. Now I am sure you can you see me sitting there on flight 5169, when I press the little switch for attention within seconds up runs the stewardess. The style and sophistication of the young thing is something that you associate with someone on a Paris catwalk: yes sir what can I get you? Whisky please, I say with a great big smile, then add. Oh, and give my wife a sherry. The last order brings a reaction from my better half: no it's far too early for a drink that's fine dear. I will have a cup of tea and when the waitress is gone my better half takes me to task, now you leave that waitress alone. You go off your head when you are on holiday - you do. I try of course to tell her that we, the passengers, are the most important people on the flight, but my

words only make her stare out of the plane window and into the blue sea below.

Landing, well now there is a thing, everyone goes quite and my eyes start to wander here and there at the other passengers. We are going to be al right I tell the wife. However, the man on the seat next to me starts to cross himself and say things under his breath. The wife just shuts her eyes. Thankfully we are down before we know it and the holiday begins in earnest. Our hotel is situated not far from the beach, but further away than the picture in the brochure, and the colours well everything so bright and wonderful. Don't go down to the harbour at night instructs the holiday representative, a lass from Kent, apparently someone got mugged there last night, losing their credit cards, traveller's cheques, and their memory. But apart from that it's fill your boots and have a really good time.

The kids are in and out of the water as if they have aqua lungs. We chat to a couple from Manchester, he is a plumber and she works in manufacturing. She can talk. To be honest I

don't know much about foreign places, but I have noticed that the sailors are in town, so I guess the resort must be some sort of base for the Americans. At 6.30 the wife and the kids and I wander down for our evening meal, then after about an hour in the restaurant we go up the street to a local pub: right Jock what do you want to drink shouts the man, and after a few drinks and an insight into the workings of the new wonderful video jukebox, we head back to the hotel. After we put the kids to bed, the wife and I have a night cap. I think we will come back next year.

Harry. (pause letting the manuscript fall to his knees) and see the couple who own the Lady Jane pub from Chichester, or Chi as they call it. Well, unfortunately Jamie will not be going back next year.

Tom. I remember when he was there; it was about two years ago.

Frank. That's right it was at the same time as when Bert MacKay bought his villa in Spain, or as Jamie used to call it: his hen house abroad.

(laughter)

Frank. You see, Harry, it was quite a surprise to us all when Jamie announced that he was going abroad for his holidays.

Harry. Why was that Frank?

Frank. Well, he did not like foreigners.

Tom. That's right that year Jamie and I went for a holiday drink after work; I remember he was anxious about the people he would meet abroad.

Harry. What bar did you go to?

Tom. We just went to the Press bar, downstairs for a quick drink. However, we stayed till shutting time.

Frank. Was that the time Jamie had to be put in a taxi and taken home?

Tom. (remembering) Yes, that's right.

Harry. (pause wondering what to say, then he takes up the story again) Now, the next part of the manuscript is slightly different, it's about a play that Jamie wrote for his local church. I will read this bit to you.

Well, the kids in the play are maybe young, but gee whiz they can really sing and dance. The play is set around the time of the First World War. We open the play with a song titled: Lonely Friends. The play is about a man who never returns from war, but every night at 5.30 his Labrador dog goes to meet him at the bus stop. The dog waits for him there, but like so many others he never returns, and as all the people alight off the bus stop they comment about the dog. The play is a story about duty, patience and faithfulness.

Harry, I knew Jamie went to church, but I never knew he wrote plays, did you? (no one answers so Harry ruffles the manuscript to make tension, no one says anything.) Right we are getting to an important stage, and this next part is called The Stuff Dreams Are Made Of. *She will always be a secret to me; I first came across her at a charity organisation event in the city. She was standing holding a coffee cup, talking to a friend, then she looked at me, and with a funny face she changed my life. After this we met every Friday night at a cafe bar in town, a place where no one seems to mind if a man and another man's wife sit together. We were like runaway lovers. We would sit and stare into each others' eyes and make plans for the future: Oh, maybe next year darling, maybe next year. Then with a kiss we would leave and go our separate ways, both to unhappy homes.*

Harry: The stuff dreams are made of seems quite interesting, but does anyone know if it was drawn from real life.

(Profound silence)

Frank. There was talk at one time, but to be honest with you, Harry, if you listen to every thing in here, you would be pretty well mixed up about life by the time your shift had finished.

Harry: That's true, Frank, and I know it's difficult but…

Tom. (interrupts) Listen why don't you just forget about the manuscript and talk about Jamie, the way the police did. You ask the questions and we will answer them. What were his habits? Who did he like, and who did he dislike, and so on?

Angus. Oh, no, Tom, I think we are finding out much more this way. I mean the least we can do is listen to what he wrote, (pause) By the way does he name the woman?

Harry. (looks down at the manuscript and starts to read)

I would sit at work everyday dreaming about Catherine. I would say to myself one day we will travel abroad over mountains through cities in old fashioned trains and fly on night flights high above the chaotic world to exotic places.

Harry. That's it Angus it doesn't reveal anything more about her. It could very well be just another piece of fiction. (pause) Now, we are approaching the important part in the manuscript called, Murder in the Reading Room, but first of all Jamie talks about art and in particular a painting he liked called, The Howler Man.

Sunday the day of rest and as usual in the afternoon I go from the dinning table to the hut to paint. Today my art thoughts are really quite interesting, for they seem to be in a flux between an imaginary landscape and a killer's face. I admit it is quite a contrast; however I shall try

and describe the scene. I see the killer's face as petulant and drained of goodness. He has a bread basket body with strong arms and behind him lies a dark landscape where all the trees have been killed by Dutch elm disease. The trees represent the dead earth and the man's face the killer. Howler Man will kill the goodness in life if you let him. Now after finishing the painting I step back and look at my Howler man. Then a poem comes to mind, and I note it down in my little note pad that I always carry around with me.

Killer killer can't you see
I have painted you for me,
You ain't strong and you ain't free
Killer killer how can you be.

The painting, and the poem, may not be popular, or make me money, but I tell you it makes me happy. I always feel good when I paint. I really do believe in art, however, I will be the first to admit that strange things can happen when subterranean images collide with the clear glass

of reality. And I tell you that night when I went to bed I had a bad dream, and when I awoke I remembered the face of the Howler man and the way he screamed at me saying: You will soon be killed! I shouted back at the Howler Man only to be told by my wife to keep quiet. You're dreaming again Jamie. Keep quiet, you will wake the neighbours.

(all the men in the Reading Room laugh)

Harry. Well, there you are an interpretation of life, or was Jamie interested in art, or was he just sort of playing at it. (putting down the manuscript)

Frank. Oh, Jamie was interested in art all right. In the old days I remember he would say to me: Good I'm doing the late Saturday shift this week, and that means I can bring my paints in and work on them at lunch time."

Tom. That's right Frank, and he would talk with that long haired chap from the advertising department, what was his name again.

Frank. Willie Watson.

Tom. They would talk for hours. I used to get fed up listening to them: Listen man, all you do is grow your hair long and let nothing bother you, that's how you become an aesthete, Willie Wilson would say to him. Jamie would be sympathetic and nod, but then he would say to him: I can't believe in nothing, Willie. This would make Willie Wilson storm out of the Reading Room, and we would all laugh.

Frank. He was a bit of a lad, you know, Willie Wilson; I wonder what he is doing now.

Angus. Someone told me he has joined the police.

(laughter)

Harry. Right getting back to the manuscript, I see that Jamie was a great D H Lawrence fan.

Angus. Is that Lawrence of Arabia?

(Laughter)

Harry. No, Angus, D. H. Lawrence was the son of a miner who wrote among other things a book called Lady Chatterley's Lover.

Angus. Oh, right.

Harry. Yes, it says here in the manuscript that Jamie had read all his novels; in fact once he went to Eastwood the birth place of D H Lawrence on a sort of pilgrimage. (pause) Now, where was I. Oh yes here it is here. The next section is the one we have all been waiting for: Murder in the Reading Room.

(dramatic pause then Harry starts to read again)

I was just finishing my apple crumple pie when I saw Frank, Tom and Angus all walk into the canteen. You see we usually have to leave a presence in the Reading Room; however today the system has gone down, and by all accounts it will not be up till tomorrow again. As I sat there in the canteen enjoying my sweet, I could not help but think about what I was going to write about next, when all of a sudden like a flash an idea for a play came into my mind: Murder in the Reading Room. Yes, that is what I will call it. I will write a play and make all the characters in the play the men whom I know and work beside. It will be a play about good against evil, and hate against love. Now who will be the murderer in this play? (pause)

(suspense)

First, there is Frank. Yes, Frank and I used to be good friends that is up until he suggested that I go for that management job. It would be easy to mix the issue up and let Frank's troubled mind get the better of him. Next there is Angus. Well,

Angus has just recently fallen out with my son over some girl. It would be easy to wind him up and that quick temper of his to get the better of him. And lastly there is Tom. Well, Tom and I have worked together as a pair for many years and strangely enough just recently I forgot to return some money I owed to him. However, the reason Tom would like to kill me is not because of that but because of an affair I had with is wife about a year ago. Yes, the woman I met at the charity do, a few years ago, was his wife.

(In a burst of anger)

Tom. Yes, I killed him! I never forgave him for seeing my wife, but how he came to write this book I will never know.

(Coolly Harry picks up a nearby phone and dials the security, and knowing that it will take just a few minutes before they will appear he says.)

Harry. Can I ask you, Tom, to tell us just what happened?

(long pause)

Tom. Late on in the afternoon, trying to be kind, I asked Jamie if he wanted a look at my evening paper. However, he had too much to drink and kept on laughing at me, that dirty laugh of his, and it made me so mad that I thought I would fix him this time. So later on, when he was snoozing, I slipped out through the despatch area, avoiding the security men and cameras, and went up the road to a chemical factory owned by a man I know. When I got there lucky for me there was no one there so I just walked inside. I remembered where he had his office. Once inside his office I remembered that he kept poison there in a cabinet above his desk to kill rats with. After finding it I poured some poison out into a little bottle that I found in the wastepaper bin. Then I rushed back to the Reading Room without leaving a trace of ever being there. Just before going home that night I wrote a card out and poured the poison into a whisky tumbler and placed it on top of Jamie's

locker. We do this quite a lot, leave someone a drink, and I knew that it would not look unusual. I knew he had a few that day and he would see the card and think nothing of it. I knew he would think it was Vodka and he would just drink it back quickly, birthday or no birthday card.

(Security guards arrive)

Harry. Yes, would you take this man to the security area and hold him. The police will be here shortly.

(Exit Tom and the security guards)

Harry. Well, that's it all over now. Inspector Strummer will soon be along to interview the man who murdered Jamie the Copy Reader. I really don't think we need show him this manuscript, do you?

(Throws the manuscript in the bin)

The author will never make a playwright - will he?

(And he laughs)

https://walkerjohna.wordpress.com/

http://www.cosmos-original-productions.co.uk/